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A HOME WEEKLY FOR WINTER NIGHTS
AND SUMMER DAYS.

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No. 266.

RED ROB, THE BOY ROAD AGENT!

BY OLL COOMES,

Author of "Dakota Dan," "Bowie-Knife Ben," "Old Hurricane," "Hawkeye Harry," "Death-Notch, the Destroyer," "One-Armed Alf," etc.

CHAPTER I. THE WAGON TRAIN.

AN emigrant train was creeping slowly and laboriously along the valley of a small tributary of the Rio Grande, toward Conejos, a little Spanish-Mexican town of southern Colorado.

It was a warm May day; there was no cool shade in which to rest, no breeze to fan the brows of the weary travelers. A cloud of dust hanging upon the air, marked for miles the course they had come, and the village before them, now plainly visible, was the end of their day's journey.

The train consisted of six canvas-covered wagons, with four mules harnessed to each, and an African jehu mounted upon each near wheel, with a long whip in his hand and a sleepy look in his eyes.

There were, also, some extra mules and several ponies and saddle-horses, led and driven behind the train.

The party consisted of some twenty persons, including men, women and children; half of all were blacks.

There were three white families, the St. Kenelm, the Boswells, and the Gilberts, in the party. The blacks were their servants.

The St. Kenelm and Gilberts were from northern Missouri, the Boswells from southern Iowa—all living near neighbors for many years. The two first-named had once been wealthy, but the war of the States had impoverished them; and, too proud-spirited to sit down and weep over their lost fortunes, they resolved to strike out and retrieve their vanished wealth in the great, wide West, the Boswells accompanying them. Most of the blacks had been slaves of the St. Kenelm and Gilberts, but after their emancipation they were retained as employees by their old masters.

By some means or other our friends had heard that the valleys and mountains of northern New Mexico and southern Colorado were teeming with untold wealth, which awaited only willing hands to convert it into use. And thither were they now going—into the midst of unknown dangers—far from the habitations of civilized men.

A few of this little band claim our notice, the St. Kenelm in particular, of whom there were but two—brother and sister. They were orphans.

Albert St. Kenelm was about eight-and-twenty years of age. He was a noble specimen of physical manhood, and the pleasant, unobtrusive air of a born gentleman. He had been reared in opulence, possessed a good education, and had never known a want that money could supply, until the doom of slavery fell upon their land. However, he was not one of those whose haughty pride and arrogance were characteristics of some of the old families of the South. He was kind, generous and polite. He had been a soldier—fought for his cause in the Confederate army. He enlisted as a private; was discharged a major.

Octavia St. Kenelm was the opposite of her noble, handsome brother in many respects. She was not over seventeen years of age—a little fairy-like creature, whose dark, dreamy eyes, full of the spirit of mischief, olive complexion, fair face, and wealth of black, silken hair, gave her that rare type of beauty that belongs to Castilian blood.

She was dressed in a traveling-suit that well became her beauty; and during the long journey she had contributed much, by her vivacity of spirit, to the pleasure and enjoyment of the party. Her coming was like a burst of sunshine. She was kind-hearted and generous, like her brother, yet full of innocent mischief and girlish pranks. She was a splendid equestrienne, fearless and daring, often risking dangers from which the more cautious would have shrunk with fear. She was not without her faults, however. Womanlike, she would have her own way. In this she had been encouraged from a little child by old Aunt Shady, the negress, who had been a mother to her for years. She could deny the child nothing, and now the woman would not be denied.

Octavia was entirely heart-free. She bestowed her love upon none but her brother and Aunt Shady; although many were the youths that had worshiped at the shrine of her beauty.

The Boswell family consisted of six persons—father, mother, and four children. Two of the latter, a boy and girl, had grown to man and womanhood.

Richard Boswell was a thorough "westerner," and a fine specimen of manhood. He had fought in the Northern army against his young friend, St. Kenelm; but, now that the war was ended, they laid aside all party and political differences and renewed their old-time friendship.

Maggie Boswell, Richard's sister, was a sweet,



He held a bugle to his lips, ever and anon sending forth a shrill blast upon it.

modest girl of eighteen, with brown eyes and brown hair, a bright, pleasant and open countenance, a clear, musical voice, and a graceful, sylph-like form. She was the bosom friend of Octavia, and like her in one particular, was full of joy and merriment, but unlike her in another, she loved and was loved. To Albert St. Kenelm had Maggie plighted her heart and hand, though not one of the whole party knew aught of their engagement.

The Gilbert family was composed of five persons, but with them we have nothing in particular to do at present.

Among the blacks that made up the rest of the party, was old Aunt Shady, the negress who had been in the St. Kenelm family many years. She was over fifty years of age, yet strong and robust. A more kind-hearted, honest and faithful creature could not be found, and to Albert and Octavia St. Kenelm had she proven herself a devoted friend and servant.

The party was well armed with repeating-rifles of the latest pattern, besides being provided with other implements of war that few emigrants took the precaution or trouble to bring along with them. Fully aware of the dangers that beset their path, they acted upon the principle, that to be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Far in advance of the train, the mountains loomed up against the sky like a cloud-bank. Beyond this range was the shrine of their pilgrimage.

As they neared the village of Conejos, the spirits of all began to revive. A hard day's journeying beneath the hot sun and over dry, dusty roads, had quite fatigued both man and beast; but at Conejos they had arranged to stop for a week or so to rest and recuperate before undertaking the journey through the mountains.

The little village of adobes was about five miles away, yet it did not seem to be over half that distance to the travelers. And so Octavia St. Kenelm, fired with her usual spirit of mischief and woman-curiosity, resolved, to precede the train into the dull little village, which she declared was sound asleep, at the foot of the mountain.

She fell behind and ordered Jupiter, one of the black servants, to saddle up her pony, a spirited mustang that she had purchased of the Indians with some jewelry. Jupiter, like the rest of the men, was only too eager to obey the mandates of the bright-eyed girl, and at once proceeded to saddle the pony. In a few minutes more Octavia was mounted and galloping past the wagons toward Conejos, her fair face flushed with merriment, while pleasant words and musical peals of laughter burst from her lips as she swept apast each tilted vehicle.

In the foremost wagon was old Aunt Shady, and Octavia wondered if she could get past without the old woman seeing her. But she did not. Aunt Shady was on the look-out, and as the maiden approached one edge of the can-

vas tilt was suddenly raised, and a round, black face, set in a frame of white woolly hair, peered out.

It was a good-natured looking face, with its big white eyes and double row of pearly teeth, yet it assumed a look of blank astonishment and injured confidence, when Octavia was discovered.

"Bress my soul!" came in measured accents from the old negress' lips.

"Why, Aunt Shady, what's the matter?" asked the mischievous little Octavia, in feigned surprise, as she drew rein alongside of the wagon.

"I am completely 'stonished, I is."

"Indeed, Aunt Shady?"

"Yes, indeed. Whar under de sun an' shinin' stars are you jist gwine now, Octaby?"

"Going on to Conejos to wake up the citizens and tell them we are coming," was Octavia's reply, spoken with an air of feigned innocence.

"Heavenly Fadder, chile! is you jist gwine crazy? If arn't de middle ob de afternoon yit, and de people ob Conejos arn't asleep yit, chile, ob course dey isn't."

A merry peal of laughter was Octavia's only response. She gave her pony the reins, and waving her little brown hand to Aunt Shady, galloped away.

The old negress dropped the tilt, straightened up and burst into a fit of hearty laughter that shook her fat sides, until the whole wagon

seemed to become inspired and began to shake too.

"I's proud ob dat chile, I is," she finally said to herself, yet aloud. Then as her face assumed an expression of that mild, motherly indignation, she continued: "but, she'll jist brake my ole heart, she will, ef she don't mind what I says. She jist alers would hab her own way; and when I says: 'Octaby, no; Octaby, don't, out will come dat witchin' little laff, and right down into ole Shady's heart will go dem bright eyes, and to save my soul all I can say is to laff and laff and laff, and when I's done laffin' Octaby's gone."

CHAPTER II. OCTAVIA'S CAVALIER.

OCTAVIA cantered leisurely along the dim road leading toward Conejos, her young mind free of all but pleasant, girlish thoughts, her young heart untrammelled by the cares and vexations of life.

The road ran along the creek, winding in and out of little mottes of timber, and twisting around the bluffs.

The plain had appeared perfectly level all the way to the village; but, to Octavia's surprise, she found it a continuation of gentle swells, and now and then quite a hill. Without halting, however, she galloped on down the valley. The train was hidden from her view now by a point of land projecting into the valley. Before her, a swell in the plain shut out Conejos from her view. To her left was a clump of stunted pines, from the shadows of which a horseman suddenly appeared at a sweeping gallop. He was headed down the valley, coming directly toward her.

For once Octavia felt an involuntary fear steal over her, for she knew not what danger threatened. As the horseman drew nearer, however, she saw that he was a white man, and her fears, in a measure, subsided.

Reaching the road, the man wheeled his horse into the wagon-track and rode up alongside of the maiden. Lifting his hat, he bowed politely, at the same time saying, in pure English:

"Pardon my intrusion, senorita."

Octavia glanced up at the stranger, whose voice was soft and musical almost as that of a Moorish maid. The next moment a flush suffused her pretty face. Her heart gave a great throb, sending the life-current leaping through her veins. Her eyes were downcast with a childlike embarrassment.

She had been completely surprised. With her sudden fears was associated the face of a rough-bearded man, but the face was that of a boy. The youth could not have been over eighteen years of age, and yet his form was developed into perfect manhood, and his face, although smooth as a maiden's, wore an open, manly look. His eyes were of a dark blue, soft in expression, large and lustrous. Yet there was that in their depths that denoted the courage of a lion, the gentleness of a child; the fierceness of the hawk, the mildness of the dove—a deadly foe, a devoted friend. His features were of a type more remarkable for the strength of character they indicated than for mere beauty.

He was dressed in a style becoming his age and personal appearance. On his head he wore a Mexican sombrero banded with gold. A serape of fine texture and of a purple hue, was thrown over his shoulders and fastened together at the throat with a jeweled clasp. This concealed most of his garb, but a breeze drifting up the valley, threw back the edge of the shawl, revealing a dress of the finest texture, and made after the style of a ranchero's, the whole fairly dazzling the eyes of Octavia.

The maiden beheld her ideal of perfect manhood in this dashing young stranger, and in unconscious admiration could but gaze upon his handsome face and form. Nor was this admiration without a response, for his very soul seemed exalted by the glance of her dark eyes and the soft music of her voice.

She politely bowed her acceptance of his apology for his intrusion upon her solitude, though a slight tremor in her voice betrayed her inward emotions.

"You ride alone, senorita?"

"I did," she replied, with a faint smile; and then, as her womanly curiosity began to assert itself, she asked a question also:

"Do you go to Conejos?" and she touched her pony with the whip to quiet its fears of the prancing horse the youth bestrode.

"I go only to the cross-roads leading to Loma," the boy replied; "then you reside at Conejos?"

"No, sir; I belong to an emigrant train that is coming a short way behind."

"Oh, indeed?" he exclaimed; "have you traveled far?"

"From the Missouri river."

"You are risking many dangers in passing through this country. The Arapahoes and Cheyennes are continually roving about over these plains in search of some one to murder, and if they don't find whites, they'll turn in and murder one another. Moreover, the white outlaws under the notorious Red Rob keep the whole country, from the headwaters of the Rio Grande to Santa Fe, in a fever of excitement."

"We have been frequently warned of that robber band, but as we have nothing of value in our train that robbers are likely to want, we have no fears."

"I beg to differ with you, my fair friend," the youth replied; "there is that in your train which is of precious value to a robber or a Christian."

Octavia reflected. She wondered what he had reference to; moreover, how he knew they had anything at all.

"I am sure I know of nothing, unless it is our jaded mules, which we propose to give a week's rest at Conejos."

"It is not your animals, senorita; it is yourself."

Octavia started, and grew red and white by turns. Such a thought had never occurred to her young mind before; and it struck her so suddenly now that a vague fear, such as she had never experienced, stole upon her. She involuntarily glanced back to see how far her friends were away. But they were not yet in sight—Conejos was still hidden from her view, and a sense of her helplessness, in case of danger, made the presence of the young cavalier quite agreeable. But, whatever pleasure or security she felt in his companionship, she was soon compelled to forego it for, reaching the cross-roads leading to Loma, the youth drew rein, saying:

"Here I leave you, senorita. May you have a pleasant sojourn at Conejos."

"Thank you, sir," Octavia replied, her eyes sparkling; "but to whom am I indebted for this kind wish?"

The youth appeared not to hear her question, but lifting his sombrero, and waving her an adieu, he turned his horse's head toward Loma, and galloped away at a furious speed.

Octavia, who had drawn rein, sat motionless and watched the retreating form in a kind of mental abstraction. A feeling of disquiet or apprehension stole over her young heart, and with it soon came a vague loneliness that seemed to increase with the distance that was momentarily separating her further and further from the handsome, unknown boy.

Forgetful of what she was doing, she continued to gaze after the youth, who, gaining the summit of the ridge, turned in his saddle, and, waving his hand to her, disappeared beyond the hill.

Octavia's heart gave a great bound, for with that act a delicious pleasure filled her breast and banished her unrest. Turning her pony's head, she rode rapidly back toward the train, to inquire into the non-appearance of her friends around the hill. They had had plenty time in which to make the distance, and she was surprised at their delay. As she rode along, a fearful sound suddenly smote upon her ears. It came from the direction of the train. It was the report of firearms, mingled with yells and shouts. These were succeeded by a thunderous boom that came crashing forth upon the air with more violence than a thunderbolt from heaven. The earth seemed to rock as the waves of the terrific sound rolled along the surface and swelled upon the air, starting a hundred echoes far and near.

"Oh, mercy!" cried Octavia, "that was the cannon; the train has been attacked by Indians or robbers!"

She urged her pony forward.

The prolonged twang of a horn suddenly pealed forth upon the air.

The maiden glanced up the valley toward the north, and to her surprise beheld her late young cavalier galloping along the ridge in the direction of the train. He held a bugle to his lips, ever and anon sending forth a shrill blast upon it.

And still another surprise awaited her.

A band of horsemen burst suddenly from the little grove of pines, out of which the youth had emerged but a few minutes previous. All were armed, for she could see their weapons gleaming in the sunlight.

At a wild, breakneck speed they thundered across the valley and swept up the hill toward that mysterious young knight of the plain.

"Thank God!" burst in accents of joy from Octavia's lips; "they are rangers—they are going to help my friends—and he is their leader!"

CHAPTER III.

THE SOLDIERS' BIVOUAC.

NORTHERN NEW MEXICO.

To this land of Aztec ruins, deserted Zuni cities perched upon lofty summits amid the purple clouds; to this land of ancient volcanoes, of hidden rivers, of yawning chasms and grim, savage forests; to this mysterious land, whose history is written only in cipher, where once burned the fires of the Sun-worshippers, we would now lead the gentle reader.

Under the somber shadows of a pinon forest, in the fertile valley of the San Juan, four men reposed in their bivouac. They were soldiers of the United States, as their uniforms denoted, and belonged to the garrison at Fort Defiance, in Arizona.

The day was nearly spent. The wind drifted down from the cool heights of the distant mountains, and rumbled chill and sullen through the rifts and gorges of the adjacent foothills. Strange voices whispered in still stranger tones among the somber pinons. Buzzards wheeled in the air above the camp with their naked, coral necks outstretched and greedy eyes looking to earth as if in anticipation of an early feast. Coyotes howled in the distance.

The location and its surroundings were well calculated to inspire the deepest melancholy and gloomiest forebodings. And perhaps they did, but not one of that little band of veterans admitted it by word or look. Reclining in positions of ease and repose upon their waterproof blankets, that had come from Navajo looms, they smoked their pipes and conversed with the ease and composure of men accustomed to camp-life.

This little party was under command of James H. Miller, the Indian agent of the Navajos; and the object which had brought them into the San Juan valley was for furthering the humanitarian Indian policy, of which Mr. Miller was an earnest advocate. The anxieties from the Government to the Navajos had been exhausted, and for two years in succession the crops of the semi-barbarous agriculturists had failed. Thus, on the verge of starvation and confined to their reservation, the Indians were on the eve of open hostilities. It required every effort of the agent to prevent it, and in hopes of finding a district more suitable for a reservation and agricultural pur-

poses, he had penetrated into the valley of the San Juan, accompanied by three companions; and it is thus that we find them encamped in that valley, not far from the Rio del los Pinos.

"I feel thankful to heaven," Mr. Miller finally remarked, starting from his silent thoughts, "that this expedition was undertaken."

"You think then this valley is sufficiently fertile for the maintenance of the tribe, do you?" asked Ben Thomas.

"I do. Water in this arid, volcanic land is the greatest consideration, and the San Juan and its series of tributaries will furnish this in abundance for irrigation."

"But it seems that rivers in this country go dry or sink beneath the earth's surface, and the San Juan may also disappear."

"I think it has been dry at some remote period of the past," said Jesus Alviso, the Mexican interpreter.

"What proof have you of this, Alviso?" asked the Indian agent.

"The deserted pueblos and ruined acequias, senor."

"I cannot think so, Alviso. The formation of this valley leads me to a different opinion."

"Then why was this valley deserted? We have ample evidence of its having once been densely populated."

"I know it, and cannot account for its desertion upon any other theory than that the Apaches, those ancient foes of the Navajos, overran the valley at some remote period of the past. This country is an enigma to the antiquarian. It has been the scene of local strife and bloodshed ever since the Spanish invaders endeavored to supplant the old Mexican faith. The wrath of God seems to have fallen upon this country. It is the Egypt of the New World, for the 'Seven cities of the Cibolas,' on the de Chaco river, and the fortified city of the Aztecs, Quivira, on the San Juan, answer to the once populous cities of Babylon and Nineveh. We have evidence of a superior race of people having once dwelt here. Their ruined cities attest this. But now it has become almost a desert. A few roving bands of Indians, white robbers, and now and then a few treasure-hunters, like Bedouins, rove about over the country. This region is undoubtedly rich in mineral deposits, and it is my opinion that, if the Indian Appropriation Bill now pending in Congress, passes, there will be a great rush to this land of ruins."

"In which case troubles will multiply," said Ben Thomas. "With the Mexican outlaws to the south of us, the Utes and Mormons on the west, and a horde of lawless treasure-seekers pouring in from all quarters of the globe, what will be the result?"

"War, robbery and crime," responded Alviso.

"I apprehend no trouble from the Utes," said Miller.

"Do not trust them, senor. They appear friendly, but even at this moment they may be in this valley."

The man's words seemed prophetic.

"Well," said Mr. Miller, starting to his feet, "I must not neglect the view from the summit of yonder cliff."

He took a small field-glass from among his effects, and, accompanied by Alviso, started toward the hill, across a beautiful valley. The pinons swayed gently above them, the green grass rustled to their hasty footsteps. Soon they reached the foot of the bluff—a spur of the San Juan mountain—and with light foot-steps started up the steep acclivity. They soon gained the towering summit and turned their faces westward.

The sun was just sinking behind a distant range of hills. The mountain tops around them seemed ablaze with fire—altars upon which burned the eternal fires of the Montezumas. The valley and forest lay brooding in death-like shadows beneath them.

With his glass the agent swept the surrounding hills, valleys and mountains. Far away upon a lofty summit to the westward he descried the gray outlines of one of those ancient ruined cities. It loomed up against the sky grim and ghostly.

For a moment Miller studied the old remains with meditative silence; then he turned his glass upon another object to which his attention had been called by his companion. He scanned it for a moment, then exclaimed:

"That beats me, Alviso."

It was a smoke, curling upward in a spiral column in the vicinity of the ruins of Quivira.

"That proves that we are not the only persons in this vicinity."

"To be sure it does, senor," replied Alviso.

"Do you think it is from an Indian camp?"

"No; it's too bold for that. I'll tell you my opinion, senor."

"Well?"

"You remember of hearing of a party of emigrants that passed through Santa Fe, about two years ago?"

"Yes; they say they acted queer. They were called Silent Tongues on account of their reticence as to their destination. All at once they disappeared. Their wagons were tracked to the old Mogul towns, where all traces of them vanished."

"That's the story, senor; and now—"

"Well?"

"I'll risk a doubloon on that smoke curling up from the retreat of the Silent Tongues."

"We'll see to-morrow," said Miller, and turning he led the way down the cliff and back to camp through the gathering shadows of twilight.

CHAPTER IV.

THE THREE MINERS.

WHEN Miller and his companion reached camp they found their comrades and supper awaiting them.

Seating themselves upon the sward the four began their repast. While thus engaged, the agent made known his discovery, and commented upon the same.

The sound of horses' hoofs and the jingle of trappings suddenly arrested their attention. Mechanically they drew their revolvers as they started and gazed uneasily around.

Three horsemen emerged from the shadows of the woods and drew rein.

One familiar with a mining district would at once have pronounced the trio a party of miners. They were mounted on strong-limbed, yet jaded-looking ponies; and were provided with huge picks and spades and other evidences of their being treasure-hunters on a prospecting tour through the country. They were also well armed. Coming from the direction of Quivira ruins, there was nothing in their looks to engender distrust in the minds of the soldiers.

Though rudely dressed, the open, frank expression in each face dispelled all apprehension. Their coming broke the savage monotony of the camp, and the quartette hailed their presence with a feeling akin to pleasure.

These three men were entirely different so far as age and personal appearances went. The eldest must have been fifty years or more of age. He was a tall, powerful man, straight and erect, with a proud, martial bearing. His

features were a pleasant, yet stern and resolute expression that was indicative of great decision of character. His eyes were of a dark gray, with that peculiarity of expression in them that one often sees in those of a docile lion. His face was covered with a pensive white beard that gave him a still more venerable and imposing look.

This man was Basil Walraymond.

The next man in point of years was Nathan Wolfe. He was about forty years of age, and was a splendid specimen of the physical man, with a rough, bearded face, upon whose features cropped out the predominant traits of the person's character.

The third was a young man of perhaps five-and-twenty years. A little above the medium height, he was possessed of the form of an athlete and the face of an Adonis. His hair, which was of a dark-brown color, was cropped closely to his head. A heavy mustache, of the same color as his hair, shaded an expressive mouth, and lent an additional look of strength to his features and of firmness to his character. In his dark-blue eyes burned the luster of health, the fire of impetuous youth and the spirit of adventure. His cheeks were bronzed, yet this rather served to strengthen his manly beauty. His voice was clear and full—almost musical.

This was Asa Sheridan.

All three were dressed in buck-skin with woollen undershirts. All wore heavy boots with jingling spurs at the heels. Broad-brimmed hats covered their heads. A leather belt encircled each waist, and in this belt were a pair of revolvers and a murderous-looking knife. A handsome rifle was swung at the back of each, by means of a strap passing over the left shoulder and under the right arm.

A month previous these three were strangers. By chance they had been thrown together at Santa Fe. Their acquaintance ripened into mutual friendship, and then their friendship developed itself into a spirit of adventure. This finally carried them on a prospecting tour into northern New Mexico and southern Colorado.

The profession and character of each one before their meeting at Santa Fe seemed of little concern to the others, for they made no inquiry of one and another of anything extending beyond their first meeting. They asked for no papers of recommendation, of moral character or social standing. On the border all kinds of characters meet—good, bad and indifferent—many of them to begin life anew, and so the past is usually considered beyond the beginning, as it were, and to ask a man for a history of himself would be almost as absurd as to ask a child for his history before it existed.

The three were friends, that was certain. They were true to each other; that had been tested in more than one difficulty with the Arapahoes and Apaches.

"A military camp, by Jove!" cried young Sheridan, as he caught sight of the soldiers' uniform in the dim glew of the camp-fire, and reined in his horse within a rod of the camp.

"Yes, on a small scale," replied Miller, advancing.

Sheridan dismounted and saluted—his companions following his example.

"Even Fort Wingate or Defiance?"

"Defiance," responded Miller. "Judging from appearances you are miners, and as it is camping time, I would just say that the hospitality of the San Juan valley and our bivouac is at your service."

"Thank you, sir," said the old man, in a bluff, yet kindly tone.

It required but a few minutes to unpack their animals and lariat them out to grass along with the soldiers' horses.

This done, the three new-comers brought out their supply of dried venison, roasted bear-meat and hard biscuit, and took supper along with their newly-made acquaintances.

"It is a blessed relief," said Basil Walraymond, "to meet white men with white hearts in this country. What are you doing here, anyhow, soldiers?"

"Looking up a new agency for the Navajos," replied Miller; "and you?"

"We are hunting gold and silver and diamonds," interrupted the mysterious old man of stone, anticipating Miller's question.

"With what success, senor?" asked Alviso.

The old man bent his fierce look upon Alviso, and his immobile face seemed to wear a faint smile of scorn.

"I'd be a fool to tell you," he responded; then his voice softened, and he continued: "but you are soldiers. You have no time to hunt treasure, so we need have no fears of your jumping our claims. The fact of it is, however, we have found no gold, no silver, no diamonds; but we have found rubies, turquoise and garnets of great value. But you needn't murder us for them, for they are cooped a hundred miles from here," and the speaker broke off into a fit of silent, good-natured laughter.

"Did you come from the direction of Quivira ruins?" Mr. Miller asked.

"Not far in that direction. We've just returned from Colorado. We saw your smoke, and beat our course this way. We go to the ruins to-morrow," replied the old man.

"I saw a smoke in the direction of the ruins a few minutes ago. There must be a settlement down there, or else—"

"Do you think so, commandant?" asked Walraymond, betraying some sudden emotion.

"It may be a party of hunters or Indians, or miners like yourselves," continued the agent. "A party of emigrants passed northward through Santa Fe a year or two ago, and nothing has been heard of them since."

"Were there any women with them?" asked the old man.

"Yes, there were two or three women. The party featured very queer and mysterious, but thoughtfully, but I believe those Silent Tongues, as they were called, have crept away into this deserted valley and taken up their abode. They might have found a rich gold mine, and are working it secretly; or they may be one of those bands of outlaws that infest the mountains."

Basil Walraymond glared at Miller while he was speaking with a savage yet thoughtful look in his dark gray eyes. Then he bent his gaze upon the ground, stroked his long, hoary beard fiercely, and then resumed his eating.

The old man was agitated, and the soldiers were somewhat puzzled by his strong emotions; and were even surprised at the manner in which his own companions regarded him. He seemed to puzzle them all—a living enigma.

Supper was concluded in silence.

By this time darkness had set in. The coyotes had begun their demoniac chatter—the forest its nocturnal moan, and the cool breeze from the mountains swept chill and sad down the valley. The dark brow of the San Juan frowned ominously down upon the bivouac.

The fire was replenished with fuel. The blaze leaped upward and threw its ruddy light over the rough, bearded faces around it. Millions of sparks drifted into the purple dome of

darkness above. Shadows grim and grotesque danced in and out of the impenetrable wall of gloom around them as the flames rose and fell with the currents of air.

Silence, deep and profound, came over the party. The chill air had first checked that spontaneous flow of genial spirits that characterized most of the party. And now the warm glow of the fire being felt through every form, it carried them back to the home fireside. It recalled many pleasant thoughts, and many bitter ones, no doubt. Evening's home pleasures are associated with the warm, cheery glow of a fire. The faces we knew in youth; faces we know in manhood; faces that are of one from our view forever; faces that were wont to grow bright at our coming—all appear before the mental vision in the glowing flame. The fireside is a powerful agent. It conjures up a thousand vague images; it resurrects long-buried thoughts, oftentimes opening anew old wounds, or reviving sad, desponding spirits. And it must have wrought its mysterious influence upon Basil Walraymond, for at times a faint smile would overspread his stern, bearded face and light up the eyes; then would follow a nervous twitching of the facial muscles, and a quivering of the eyelids, that told of some bitter, agonizing thoughts tugging at his heartstrings.

None watched this mysterious old man as did Asa Sheridan. Some strange affinity seemed to have drawn the old stranger into his heart. Meanwhile young Sheridan was not aware that he had become the central figure of other eyes. The soldiers regarded him with even more interest than the old man—Alviso with evident distrust.

There was an air of reckless abandon about the youth that seemed to possess some irresistible power of magnetic attraction—something that attracted and yet dispelled, something to admire and at the same time fear.

After a few minutes' silence, the Mexican took a diary and pencil from an inner pocket. Upon the fly-leaf of the book he wrote a name. He then passed the memoranda to Miller in such an indifferent manner as not to attract attention, at the same time nodding in a significant manner at Sheridan, who sat with his back toward him.

The agent glanced at the writing in the book and read that terrible name:

"Red Rob, the Boy Road Agent!"

(To be continued.)

The Dumb Page:

OR,

THE DOGE'S DAUGHTER.

BY FREDERICK WHITTAKER,

AUTHOR OF "THE IRISH CAPTAIN," "THE RED RAJAH," "THE ROCK RIDER," "THE SEA CAT," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VENGEANCE THAT CAME.

COUNT BONETTA stood on the quarter-deck of his galley, with a group of officers round him, watching the passing gondolas, plying to and from the shore. The clock of St. Mark's had tolled five, and the captain's barge lay alongside the galley.

The count seemed to be impatient, as he watched boat after boat, and still not the one he expected.

At last, just as he was giving utterance to his anger, a large gondola, with two gondoliers in livery of purple and gold, came skimming out of the Grand Canal, and shot across the forefoot of the galley. At the entrance of the low, black cabin stood Don Lorenzo Bellario, in his most brilliant dress of white, slashed with gold, and beside him was the slight figure of the fair-haired page, in violet velvet.

Don Lorenzo raised his plumed cap as he passed, and pointed seaward toward the island of San Antonio.

The count ordered his boat round, stepped into it, and rowed away on the track of the swift gondola at an easy pace, following in its wake, accompanied by two officers.

So the two boats proceeded for a little distance, when the steersman of the Genoese captain's barge remarked to his leader:

"My lord, there is a gondola following us."

The count turned round and looked back. The lofty prow of a gondola, standing up in front of the low, funereal-looking black cabin, was indeed moving slowly in his wake.

"It is some other party on a similar excursion to our own, perhaps," he suggested, with a grim smile; "such pleasure-parties are not uncommon here. Let us hasten on. Give way, men. Double the stroke."

The rowers bent to their oars, and the barge moved rapidly off on the track of the foremost gondola.

The gondoliers redoubled their efforts to keep the lead, and the two boats rapidly approached the island of San Antonio. The rear gondola did not seem to be actuated by such haste, for it fell astern as soon as they commenced the race, and was a mere speck on the water by the time the island was reached and rounded.

Don Lorenzo and the pretty page sprung ashore, hand in hand, and at once started for the well-known rendezvous of the duellists. The tide was down, and the broad, firm beach was smooth and elastic to the feet, giving promise of good holding ground.

Count Bonetta and his officers followed, the two boats lying side by side on the beach.

When they came to the well-known place, Don Lorenzo turned and awaited the Genoese with a gay greeting.

"Well, gentlemen," he said; "you see we Venetians have a sweet place to settle our little difficulties. Nothing to see us but the sea-gulls, and the ocean breeze soon covers the dead with sands. I remember leaving five tall fellows, with their faces to the sky, in this very spot."

"Take thy leave of the place now, then," said the deep voice of Count Bonetta; "for before the sun sets thou shalt be with them."

Don Lorenzo laughed sardonically.

"Your nephew was one of them, count," he retorted, carelessly; "I peppered him finely, I warrant you, and now we shall try to put his venerable uncle in pickle."

Without another word, the Genoese commenced to take off his upper garments, handing cloak and doublet to his seconds.

Don Lorenzo smiled and laid his own delicate garments on one of the benches. As he did so, he noticed Julia very pale.

"Lorenzo," she whispered, "who is that man?"

"Count Bonetta, uncle to the Swiss pig that I poked just six months ago," was Don Lorenzo's careless reply.

"It is himself," she whispered, anxiously; "do you not know his voice? I tell you it is he."

"Whoever he be," declared Don Lorenzo, with fierce energy, as he turned round and surveyed the grizzled beard of the other, "he

shall never come back to threaten me a second time." This time I kill him. Watch me."

"Oh! be cautious, Lorenzo," she enjoined, in tones of agony; "there is something in that man's eye that tells me he is sure of victory. And if you are killed, I die, too."

"Nonsense, carina," he said, playfully; "this is my twenty-ninth duel, and I never was scratched. Good-by till after the fight."

He turned away and tripped toward his antagonist with a light, airy step, throwing his cap down on the bench as he did so. Gloriously handsome as Apollo, with a vivid freshness of color that no marble Apollo ever boasted, his glossy curls waving in the sea-breeze, his eyes sparkling bright and fierce, he waved his slight rapier in the air with a gay flourish, and said:

"On guard, Signor Bonetta."

The Genoese captain remained standing, leaning on his rapier, and spoke in his deep, sad voice:

"Don Lorenzo Bellario, do you remember this day, six months ago?"

"I do," said the other, scornfully; "and I know you now as then, Antonio Bonetta. To your guard."

"You do not know one thing," answered Bonetta, quietly; "I am safe here under the flag of Genoa, having entered her service. And moreover, I have spent nearly six months in the house of 'Cola Bottarino, in Florence. My hair is gray; but who turned it gray in one night? Who seared my heart, with his diabolical cruelty to one who meant no harm to him? Don Lorenzo Bellario, betake you to your guard, and God have mercy on your soul."

He spoke the last words with the solemnity of a judge pronouncing sentence on a criminal, and in spite of his iron nerves, Bellario shuddered involuntarily.

Bonetta raised the light rapier in his hand, and the weapons crossed with a clash.

At the sound Don Lorenzo started and smiled fiercely. He was used to the clashing of swords.

Then, with all the resources of skill and activity he possessed, he attacked the Swiss.

The latter stood as firm as a rock, his stern, blue eyes looking down on the other, while his arm and wrist, as firm as a bronze statue's, extended his point, always close to the other's body.

He hardly seemed to move, so small were the circles described by his rapier, but three times, while Don Lorenzo was circling round, with appet, feint, thrust and glissade, he found the point of Bonetta dropped close to his shoulder, as he made a low lunge, pricking him back with the warning stop-thrust.

Three times did the point pierce his shoulder, just enough to draw blood, Bonetta remaining on the defensive, with a grim smile of contempt that enraged Don Lorenzo incessantly.

The Swiss had not even extended himself, and yet the Spaniard had been compelled to leap back three times to avoid a deeper wound.

He withdrew himself out of distance at last, and stood on the defensive, a little breathless with the violent exertions he had made.

"Is that all you know?" cried Bonetta, contempt in his tone. "Cola Bottarino told me you would never make a good fencer. Guard this!"

Swiss, as he watched his enemy growing weaker and weaker, from pure exhaustion. At last Don Lorenzo paused and leaned on his sword, and Bonetta spoke:

"Now, Don Lorenzo Bellario, you are at my mercy. Now confess your treason and you shall receive your life. Confess that you put the accusation against me in the Lion's Mouth, or die!"

Bellario was trembling all over with weakness, but he straightened up once more, and faintly raised his sword.

"Kill me, signor," he muttered hoarsely; "I know nothing of your accusation. Kill me, but do not dishonor me."

Bonetta ground his teeth with a furious curse.

"Then die in your falsehood!" he shouted, and made his last fierce lunge, that beat aside the Spaniard's guard and pierced deep into his body.

Don Lorenzo sunk slowly back on the sand, his sword falling from his nerveless hand, while his face looked up, proud and defiant to the last, at his triumphant enemy.

Hardly had he done so, when, with a wild, despairing shriek, the disguised page ran forward and threw himself on his body, crying:

"Lorenzo! Lorenzo! My love, my life! He has killed him."

Then there was a sensation among the Genoese officers.

At the sound of that shriek Bonetta dropped his sword, stared at the golden curls as if thunderstruck, and ejaculated:

"The princess Julia! Holy Mother of Heaven! The villain has bewitched her, too!"

And a frown of intense pain and hatred crossed his iron features, as he gazed at his fallen foe, beautiful as ever amid all his blood, and heard the frantic girl calling on him to speak to her only one word, while she kissed the pale lips from which no answer came.

The other officers hung around, helpless and sympathetic, not knowing what to do, and Don Lorenzo lay slowly breathing away his life in the arms of Julia, when the sound of voices close by aroused everybody to the fact of strangers being present.

A brilliant crowd of cavaliers and nobles came trooping into the little arena, and within ten feet of Bonetta, with eyes distended with horror, stood Estella, the Countess Milloroni.

The cuirasses of the Swiss halberdiers of the guard were behind and around her, and on her right hand was an old noble in robes of black velvet, furled with sable, who was crowned with the ermine cap of a senator of the Republic of Venice.

Bonetta stood gazing blankly before him at the Countess. He had no eyes for any one else.

She, on her part, looked at him with amazement and terror. There was no mistake with her. The suddenly gray hair and the thin face could not hide her lover from Estella Milloroni. She knew him in an instant.

But as she glanced from him to the pale, bleeding figure of Don Lorenzo, a look of fear and aversion gathered on her face, and she turned away with a shudder.

A keen spasm of pain crossed Bonetta's countenance when he beheld that look. And then the old senator advanced and addressed him.

"You are Antonio Bonetta, formerly captain in the service of Venice," he said, more affirmatively than inquiringly.

"I am Antonio Count Lonetta, in the service of Genoa," admitted the other, proudly.

"You were in the service of Venice," continued the senator, sternly. "Where is your discharge?"

"I have none," replied Bonetta. "I am a free Swiss and need no name."

The senator turned and made a signal to the halberdiers behind. An officer advanced and laid his hand on Bonetta's shoulder.

"You are my prisoner, captain," he announced, stiffly.

Bonetta bowed, and quietly took his clothes from the hands of his seconds, as he protested: "Yield to force, but the Eagle of Genoa shall yet teach the Lion of St. Mark to respect her servants."

The senator made a mute sign, and a guard of halberdiers surrounded the Genoese officers, who could not have resisted had they wished. But they followed the example of their leader, and submitted in silence.

Then the old noble pointed to Don Lorenzo, and to the disguised page, who lay with her face hidden under her long curls, quite mute since the advent of this crowd.

"Take up yonder boy," he ordered, sternly. "Guard the young viper well. He has murdered the princess, Julia Dandolo. If the man is alive, bring him along to the boats, and then follow."

A stiff looking Swiss marched forward, seized the seeming boy by the arm, and jerked him roughly to his feet. As he did so, and the false page's face was turned round to view, deathly pale, framed in golden ringlets, Estella sprang forward with a scream of recognition. "Madonna mia!" she cried. "Count Falerio, it is Julia herself!"

The old count was completely taken aback. He rubbed his eyes, looked at the half fainting princess, whom he instantly recognized, and for a moment was at fault. But his Italian subtlety at once conceived two things—a mystery to be solved, a scandal to be hushed up.

"Take care of her, Madonna," he whispered to Estella. "This must be settled in secret council."

Then aloud:

"Halberdiers, put you wounded man in a litter, and bring him after us. When we reach the city, keep back the people, and take him round by the private entrance of the palace. Come, my lord count."

He bowed to Bonetta with formal politeness. The affair had assumed a different aspect since the mixing up of so high a family.

In ten minutes more five gondolas were bearing back the party to Venice, three of which had followed the boat of Bonetta in the wake of that mysterious boat that had excited the curiosity of the Genoese steersman.

To be continued—commenced in No. 260.)

OLL COOMES' NEW STORY!

RED ROB,

THE BOY ROAD-AGENT.

BY OLL COOMES.

In which this admirable writer deals with a line of incidents and character of a decidedly original nature.

A road-agent, and yet not a great rogue—a boy in years but a man in acts and judgment—a dread and a blessing—a bandit and a gentleman, Red Rob is a hero not all fiction, who will make a sensation in popular literature.

False Faces:

OR, THE MAN WITHOUT A NAME. A MYSTERY OF THE GREAT METROPOLIS.

BY GEO. L. AIKEN,
AUTHOR OF "A LIVING LIE," "SCARED TO DEATH," "BERNAL CLYDE," "ELMA'S CAPTIVITY," "STELLA, A STAR."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SCHEME MARRED.

"LEAVE my office, or I will call the police!" sputtered the doctor.

The keen eyes of Frank Ray saw that he was frightened, though he put on an assumption of courage.

"Call away, and you'll be toted to Ludlow street jail in a jiffy," answered the detective.

"We'll search your apartments and see what we can find."

The doctor backed up against the door leading to an inner apartment in a suspicious manner. This movement was not lost upon Frank Ray.

"Oh! you've got her in there, have you?" he cried.

"No—no—she is not here, I tell you," answered the doctor, in a kind of growl.

Frank Ray caught him by the collar and swung him around from the door with the greatest ease.

"Stand out of my way if you don't want to get hurt," he cried.

The doctor showed his yellow teeth like a famished hyena, but he did not offer any further resistance, evidently satisfied of its uselessness.

"There's a lady patient there, who was brought to me last night," he said, remonstratingly. "She is suffering from an attack of cataplexy."

Frank Ray laughed scornfully.

"You'll suffer from an attack of cataplexy one of these days," he returned. "You will have a suppression of motion when you come to be hung up with a rope around your neck!"

The doctor showed his teeth again in a manner that indicated he was not pleased with the allusion.

Frank Ray opened the door, which led into a little dark bedroom. The opening of the door, however, threw considerable light within and revealed a female form extended upon the bed.

"Here she is!" he cried.

"My child! Etta!" exclaimed Peter Shaw, seeing the pale face, about which the golden hair hung disorderly.

He sprang into the room. Chester Starke also approached the door attracted by a strong curiosity.

"She was brought here last night by strangers to me," cried the doctor. "I know nothing about her."

"Tell that to the marines!" answered Ray. "We shall make so bold as to take her away."

"She is senseless—she scarcely seems to breathe!" exclaimed Peter Shaw, apprehensively, from within.

"Then he's chloroformed her again this morning," said Ray. He turned fiercely upon the doctor, adding: "I have a great mind to put a bullet through your ugly carcass! And I would, too, only I don't wish to cheat the hangman of his due."

The doctor retreated in alarm.

"How shall we take her away?" asked Peter Shaw, perplexedly.

"Wrap her in the counterpane, and I'll carry her to the house," answered Ray.

"Will that not attract a crowd?"

"Hardly, in so short a distance. I'll risk it. Gather up her clothes; I see them on a chair. She was brought here in the same fashion that we must take her away."

"Do you intend to make any charge against me?" asked the doctor, anxiously. "The young lady has not received any injury since she has been here—and it was not my doing, her coming here."

"Umph! do you think us fools to believe that?" returned Ray.

"You can't prove anything against me," insisted the doctor.

"Perhaps not," answered Ray, who had his motives for hushing the doctor into a sense of security.

"Don't take away my revolver—I am offering no resistance," urged the doctor.

"Shall I give it to him?" asked Chester, and he looked reluctant to do so.

"Give it to me."

Ray took the revolver, sprang back the handle and removed the cartridges.

"There," he said, and gave the doctor the unloaded weapon. "You're not the kind of man I would like to trust. But mind, no tricks, or you'll suffer. When will the girl awake?"

"In two hours," answered the doctor, submissively.

"Perhaps," he added, with a curiosity that he could not control.

"Never you mind; that's our affair," returned Ray, shortly. Then he called out to Peter Shaw: "Are you ready, sir?"

"Yes."

"Very good! Let me have her."

Ray entered the chamber and returned with Etta, closely wrapped in the counterpane, in his arms.

"I will cover this over her face when we reach the street," he said, "and walk fast. People mind their own business pretty well in New York, and I don't think anybody will trouble me. At all events, I shall not stop to answer any questions. Come."

Ray bore the insensible form of Etta swiftly into the street, and Peter Shaw and Chester Starke followed him.

The people they met on the sidewalk stared surprisedly at Ray and the strange burden he bore, but they could not exactly determine whether he was carrying a sick person or a dead body, but they knew he had a human shape in his arms; the counterpane could not conceal that.

Several turned and followed them. Ray reached the door of the house in which Etta lived and went swiftly up the stairs. Peter Shaw followed him; but Chester Starke paused and confronted the little crowd that had gathered at the door. He thought he might satisfy them and send them away.

A string of questions burst upon him at once.

"What's the matter? Anybody killed? Somebody run over? Another murder? Drunk, I guess? Is it a boy, or what?"

"The old man's daughter was taken very sick at the doctor's, and he had to get a friend to bring her home," replied Chester.

"Oh! Is that all?"

The crowd dispersed in a manner that indicated they thought they had wasted their time, and Chester, smiling to himself, walked upstairs.

"Here she is!" said Ray, bearing Etta through the door that Kate held open for him. "Did you know we were coming?"

"Lord, yes, I've had my head out of the front window ever since you've been gone," answered Kate. "I saw you when you came out of the doctor's house. Bless her dear heart! here she is again." She bustled about and placed the rocking-chair for him so he could deposit his burden in it. "Why, she's asleep, and oh! how awful pale she is. Oh, she isn't dead, is she?" she added, sinking her voice to a scared whisper.

"No, no, she is still under the influence of the chloroform—she'll come to presently."

"She does look deathly," said Peter Shaw, as he joined them.

"She looks like a sleeping angel!" exclaimed Ray, fervently.

"Oh, Lord! now he's smitten with her," murmured Kate, despondently. "There'll never be any chance for me until she's married off!"

Chester Starke now came in and closed the door after him.

"There she is, Chester; what do you think of her?" asked Peter Shaw.

Chester gazed earnestly in the pale face, framed by the masses of golden hair, and Kate watched him eagerly.

"If the eyes were only open I could tell better," he answered, somewhat evasively; "but I think she is a very charming young lady."

"Ah, yes, he's fixed, too," murmured Kate. "I never did see the like! Old and young, they're all alike! They've only to set their eyes on her to fall in love with her."

Kate was right. Though it has been said that "a face with the eyes shut is like a house without windows," yet Chester saw enough in that face, even with its closed lids, to convince him that it was the face of all others that he could love.

He felt that his destiny would henceforth rest with her.

Leaving the rescued Etta to the care of her friends, and she was fortunate in having so many and such strong ones, we will return to Doctor Watervliet's office.

That skillful, but unprincipled practitioner, was deeply chagrined at what had taken place. He knew that Edgar Skelmersdale and Cebra Skelreg would be very angry with him. But he shrugged his shoulders as he consoled himself with the reflection that it could not be charged to any fault of his.

He had been taken utterly by surprise, and mortal man could not have withstood the odds brought against him.

He anxiously awaited their coming, and momentarily expected them, for they had arranged to come in a carriage, and convey Etta to a house in the outskirts of the city, Skelreg providing it, where she could be kept in close captivity until her marriage with Edgar Skelmersdale could be consummated.

The scheme was well arranged, as all their schemes were—but what scheme was ever yet proof against accident?

When the doctor heard a carriage roll up to the door and stop, he knew that they had come. He smiled grimly, despite his own anxiety, in anticipation of the bitter disappointment that awaited them.

"What can they do about it?" he asked himself, with a shrug of the shoulders. "It was not my fault."

"They came in, Skelreg in advance."

"Well, how is our fair patient?" he cried, gayly. "Has she awoken?"

"Not yet," answered the doctor. "I applied the chloroform again to keep her insensible."

"Good. Well, we may as well take her away. I've got the house all ready for her reception. Edgar, you'll have to put her in the carriage—you are stronger than I am."

Skelreg advanced to the door of the little room and pushed it open.

"Hollo! she isn't here!" he cried.

"Not there?" exclaimed Skelmersdale.

"What have you done with her?" questioned Skelreg.

The doctor smiled, but his exhibition of mirth was a ghastly one.

"She's gone!" he answered, falteringly.

"Gone?"

"What do you mean?"

"Her friends came here and took her away."

"The devil!" ejaculated Skelreg, in dismay. Edgar Skelmersdale uttered a fearful imprecation.

"Explain yourself, doctor," he added.

"What friends? How came they here? How did they know that she was here?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders in a helpless manner.

"I don't know," he answered. "There were three of them, two young men and one old, and one of the young men said he was a detective. He took my revolver from me, and withdrew the charges. See, here it is."

"The fiend himself seems to be working against us!" exclaimed Edgar, moodily.

"Well, it certainly does seem as if the Old Boy had a finger in the pie," said Skelreg. "I don't understand this business at all. Never was a trick neater done—no clue was left, I thought, by which the girl could be traced here."

"I dropped the sponge there that I used for the chloroform," observed the doctor, deprecatingly, as if he thought that might have something to do with it.

"That doesn't matter; that would not give any trace of the way we came or the way we went," rejoined Skelreg. "It looks very much to me as if we had a traitor among us. Can one of the band have betrayed us?"

"There is not a member of our order that dare turn traitor," answered Edgar. "He would know that no earthly power could shield him from our speedy vengeance."

"That's so. This is a tangled-up affair, and I can't untwist it. Give us the full particulars, Doc. Let me sift the evidence."

Skelreg put the doctor through a rigid cross-examination as if he had been a witness upon the stand, and elicited all he knew, and a description of the three men who had taken Etta away.

The description of the old man—that being the designation that the doctor applied to Peter Shaw—greatly perplexed the little lawyer.

"I can't imagine who this old party could be," he commented, musingly.

"Why, he was the girl's father," rejoined the doctor.

If a bombshell had suddenly fallen and exploded between Skelmersdale and Skelreg, they could not have been more astonished than they were at these words.

"Her father?" they both exclaimed, simultaneously.

"Yes; he called her his child."

Skelreg and Skelmersdale exchanged glances. "The devil!" ejaculated Skelreg.

"Can it be possible?" cried Skelmersdale. "It don't seem possible!" Skelreg turned again to Watervliet. "See here, Doc, haven't you made a mistake? Do you mean to say it was the same man we put down the chimney?"

The doctor seemed puzzled by this question.

"Why, no, it didn't look like him," he answered, reflectively. "This man had long white hair and a full white beard."

"Then it wasn't him!"

"Yes, it was," cried Edgar, positively. Skelreg turned a surprised look upon him.

"What makes you think so?" he demanded.

"My heart tells me so. Genni Bartyne is alive, and the father and daughter, thanks to us, are reunited."

"How can that be?" asked the bewildered lawyer.

He was very much chagrined to think that Skelmersdale should find a solution to this puzzling matter when he could not.

"Things happen strangely in this world," replied Edgar. "I noticed last night, but without paying any particular attention to it, that the broken chimney down which we thrust Genni Bartyne was on the roof of the house in which these girls were living. He must have fallen into their room, and could not have been much injured."

"Well, this just beats me!" ejaculated Skelreg. "But how could he tell that she was his daughter, for she couldn't have known it?"

"Could he not have recognized her from her strong resemblance to her mother, as I did?"

"That's so! But why didn't he break his neck when he fell? I say, Doc, wasn't that enough to kill him?"

Doctor Watervliet shrugged his shoulders in his characteristic way.

"It should have been," he answered; "but men survive all sorts of accidents."

Skelreg ran his fingers through his bushy light whiskers nervously.

"This is awkward!" he said. "Even if we had carried out our plan and married you to the girl, Edgar, we should have been no nearer to the property; at least for the present, as we should have had to have waited for Bartyne's death before we could have realized."

"He should have died suddenly," cried Edgar, fiercely.

"Ah, yes, we intended him to die suddenly before, but he didn't. There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," says the old proverb, and we slipped up on it. We had good intentions, but bad luck. What's the next move on the carpet?"

"To kill them both!" answered Edgar, savagely. "I'll have vengeance, if I can have anything else."

"Hunt! Don't take too much risk. You may rest assured that he'll look sharp after us now; and he's not the man to be trifled with."

"You are right," said Doctor Watervliet. "The first thing to be done is to look to our own safety. I shall pack up and move this afternoon. The lodge-room must be given up."

"That's so," affirmed Skelreg. "This neighborhood is too hot for us now. The brotherhood must be warned not to assemble here any more. We are liable to have the police make a descent upon us at any time now. I have an idea that Bartyne was lying in wait for us, and we spoil his scheme by carrying off the girl."

"Do you think so?" asked Edgar.

"I just do. We'll have to keep shady for a time. Things look squally. What was he doing with this detective? I'd give something handsome to know how many of us are spotted."

"Bartyne knows me, of course," answered Edgar.

"And my complicity in the girl's abduction cannot be concealed," cried the doctor.

"And I am known as your legal adviser, and I appeared with you at the wells when we went after the property," said Skelreg. "We three are in for it, but the rest, I fancy, are unknown. But that doesn't matter; we are the brains of the order, and the others are merely machines that obey our directions. We'll have to keep secluded. You'll have to leave here, Doc—and take a quiet lodging somewhere where you are not known. I shall retire to my country residence for a while, upon the classic banks of the Bronx river, and you had better go with me, Edgar."

"I will; we must disappear from the city, and leave no traces behind. We'll take a short rest while we devise some scheme to enrich us, since we have failed in the Bartyne business. One bold scheme for profit, one daring blow for vengeance, and then I am done!"

"Ecco, signum!" responded the little lawyer.

When Etta returned to consciousness, she found herself in her own bed, and Kate sitting, sewing by the bedside.

She opened her eyes languidly. Her head troubled her, her brain throbbed with a dull pain, and her eyelids felt as if they were weighted with lead.

"Dear me, how strange I feel," she murmured.

"And no wonder—you've had a very long sleep," answered Kate.

"Have I?" rejoined Etta, dreamily. "Have you had breakfast?"

"Oh! why didn't you wake me?"

"I thought it would be a pity, you were sleeping so soundly."

"I can't think what should have made me so sleepy."

"Did you dream anything?"

"No, I don't remember—dear me! my ideas are dreadfully confused. Did Mr. Shaw ask for me at breakfast?"

"Yes; he missed you very much."

"Did he?"

"Lord, yes—he loves you just like a father."

"Yes—yes!"

"And why shouldn't he?"

"Why?"

"APRIL."

BY FRANK M. MORRIS.

April's myriad sunshine arrows
Hurtled round a maiden fair;
Arabesqued her cosy boudoir;
Panning, planned her lustrous hair.
With her bronze-brown eyes a sparkle
Quickly prancing, beam astray,
Snow-white aeronaut, she chartered,
Sent the smile-wafts on its way.
Soon the dainty, freighted message
Safely reached its destined port;
Soon its thought-dips set in motion,
Hope-rills, in a heart's throat.
Thus, the merry scribe had written:
"If you wish to know your fate;
With your pencil, gently pressing,
Ope the lace-formed, mystic gate!"
Swift the novel entrance reaching
Lo, disclosed a crystal pool,
Whose soft-shed, reflected mainly,
Only two words—"APRIL FOOL!"

Twilight drifted to its moorings;
Evening lullaby-dusts shivered bark;
Sky-born sails left earth-born shadows,
Whither speeds that human ark?
Hope's bright dove that morn had wandered,
Night returned to its old haunt;
Only wreathing boughs of cypress
Circled fate-words—wafts of chance.

Heart adrift from isles Utopian;
Love's frail billows turned to foam;
Ocean wide, whose peace has flown!
For a heart whose peace has flown!
Could that be a gleaming shadow—
"Harry! why—why are you at home?"
"No, I'm on Love's Ocean sailing."
Blissful ocean—dearest, own!
Shine and shade, like April weather,
Kissed the joy-dashed cheeks, quite cool.
As he bent to catch the whisper,
Briefer yet, then—"April Fool!"

The Terrible Truth:
OR,
THE THORNHURST MYSTERY.

BY MRS. JENNIE DAVIS BURTON,
AUTHOR OF "STRANGELY WED," "THE FALSE
WIDOW," "ADRIA, THE ADOPTED," "CO-
RAL AND RUBY," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XI.

AN OLD ADAGE VERIFIED.

SIR RUPERT ARCHER was the sensation very soon after that. A handsome young baronet with a yearly income of ten thousand pounds, and an estate in Sussex, with wonderful reports of its extent and magnificence floating in the charmed atmosphere he frequented, was a worthy acquisition to New York upper ten, and it was not long before Sir Rupert Archer was actually making the manner in which he was besieged on all sides.

"For a young man of ordinarily modest pretensions, this is proving rather too much no toisey," remarked the baronet to Vane Vivian, as they sat smoking together in the apartments of the former. "See that stack of cards and scented, rose-tinted notes, will you? Most of them from people I've never seen and never care to see. Why the deuce couldn't I have avoided this season of yours and timed myself to my real object in coming—a grand buffalo hunt on those wide Western prairies. I might as well have gone to Brighton, at once, as to cross the Atlantic the last of October. I go to the country for a week, fortunately. I couldn't answer for my own sanity under an unbroken strain like the fortnight past."

"Will you always be the same unpretending flower, Sir Rupert? This is of a piece with your running away from a party of American tourists at Florence who fell in love with you at first sight, and were determined to make a lion of you, willy nilly."

"I haven't your bravery, Vivian, as exhibited then or now. I'll never forget your coolness displayed in rescuing me from that nest of brigands I walked into with open eyes."

"A remarkable feat, wasn't it, after you had held your own against eight of them for a good half hour, dropped three, and would have routed the rest but for their hope of reinforcement. The cowardly rascals never waited to look behind them when my seven-shooter opened on them from the rear. I remember you declared you would rather face the same situation over again than be dragged back to that tourist party in Florence."

"Notwithstanding which you were relentless in dragging me back. And, speaking of constitutional modesty, you certainly have your own share of it. I succeeded in making myself quite interesting to Miss Carteret, last evening, in relating how gallantly you had come to my rescue, and rendered the important service of saving my—to me—rather valuable life. It appears you had never even hinted the fact among your friends."

"Nothing to boast of, my dear fellow, since, as I remarked to like effect before, you were in the fairest possible way of saving yourself. But now suppose we go back to the original point. You are being bored to death, to take your own word for it, here in New York. What do you say to a month at Thornhurst, where we all go for the Christmas festivities? I've been wanting to propose it ever since, my met, but was almost afraid the attractions of the metropolis would prove too great an object against all we can offer you. Thornhurst is a fine old place for all that. Not to compare with your Sussex parks and manors, I dare say, but a spot we are rather inclined to be proud of. There's some game of the smaller sort, plenty of liberty, and enough of the city element to accompany us, not to mention our standard families there. Do you think you can resign yourself to the prospect, Sir Rupert?"

"Resign! My dear Vane, nothing could delight me more. I can breathe again with that pleasure in perspective, and be reconciled meantime."

"Then I shall report you on the list. Mrs. Grahame and Miss Carteret have both been anxious to secure you among the number of our Christmas guests."

"A pretty little girl, that Miss Carteret, Vane," remarked Sir Rupert, lighting a fresh cigar. "Do you mean to marry her?"

"It's a damned nice question for you to ask, that is. Ain't I going the straight road to perdition fast enough without dragging a dainty piece of flesh and blood like Nora Carteret along with me?"

"But you might stop on the road, Vivian. Pardon the liberty, my dear fellow, and allow me to say from what I've seen of late I fancy you absolutely need to put a check upon yourself."

Sir Rupert tossed away the freshly-lighted cigar and stood up, dropping his hand affectionately upon the other's shoulder.

It is not the habit among men to interfere with one another's pursuits, whether of business or pleasure or licensed vice, and Vane Vivian knew only the sincerest depth of friendship prompted this approach to remonstrance. He was not untouched by it, but habit is a strong master, and he only answered, carelessly:

"You never were more correct in your life, I dare say. I haven't a doubt but I'll find a check sooner or later. The path I've been

traveling of 'reckless days and restless nights' is apt to lead somewhere, and I'll find the end of it at the appointed time. By-the-by, don't let any consideration for me stand in the way if you've any notion of falling in love with Nora yourself, Sir Rupert."

They were both at a brilliant dinner-party given by Mrs. Grahame that same evening, in honor of Sir Rupert himself. He would leave for a short trip into the country on the following day, and Mrs. Grahame had determined that the dinner should eclipse anything of the sort which had gone before.

Nora was at her fairest, as the baronet leaved over her chair during the evening, for Miss Carteret was an exception to the modest Englishman's general avoidance of the sex. A very pretty, attractive little girl, this Miss Carteret was, and her greatest charm, in his eyes, was her lack of all affectation, her natural candor and truthfulness.

"I never was more delighted with any young lady in my life," Sir Rupert mused, running his fingers through that rippling bronze beard, looking down upon the bright, graceful head, the fair outline of face, and snowy throat. "And yet I am not the least in love with her myself. She is not at all after my ideal—that is, the ideal I have pictured dimly as some day filling the vacancy at Archer Hall. But I believe in my soul it would be the salvation of Vivian if he once came under the influence of this brown-eyed fairy."

"Sir Rupert Archer, where have your thoughts gone, pray? Are you aware that you have been answering my remarks quite indiscriminately—that you said 'yes' to my two repeated questions of your opinion regarding Nilsson, and 'very fine' when I asked if you intended visiting Washington during the session there. And you were looking at me as though you might have been gazing 'down the corridor of time' instead."

"And I have left my impression there quite ahead of time. I was not aware I had fallen dreaming, but you American young ladies are so remarkably wide awake that I must look sharp after myself. Has Vivian told you that I have accepted his invitation to go to Thornhurst?"

"I have scarcely passed three words with Mr. Vivian all the evening, but Mrs. Grahame found opportunity to whisper the glad tidings. Let me commend the excellent taste you have displayed, Sir Rupert. New York is delightful, but Thornhurst surpasses it. There is only one drawback to my perfect enjoyment at either place."

"And that is?" he asked.

"Owen Dare. That man is coming to be the bete noir of my existence. Sir Rupert, do you imagine the influence he contrives to exert over Vane is for any good?"

The brown eyes looked up at him a trifle anxiously, while the dainty flush in the sensitive face deepened perceptibly.

"Really, I have not given Mr. Owen Dare credit for exercising any influence over Vivian. Vane is not the sort of person to be easily influenced. I confess that I never took particularly to Mr. Dare, however, not even when I saw more of him than I have done here, up on the continent."

"I am morally certain that Owen Dare has some deep-rooted spite against Vane. I know him to be a hypocrite; I believe him thoroughly unprincipled. I have caught him once or twice, when he thought himself unobserved, with a look in his eyes, not a pleasant look, and one I am sure which bodes no good to Vane. I tried to warn him once, but he would not listen to me. You are his friend, Sir Rupert; if any one can counteract Dare's influence, you can. Persuade Vane to trust less freely in him, to put his loyalty to the test, at least to put it out of his power to poison Colonel Vivian's mind against his son. I believe him fully capable of it."

"Do you fear that, Miss Carteret? That would be worse than any influence he is apt to exert over Vane individually. I cannot imagine any good to come through warning him, however. Vane is one of those impulsive mortals who will stand by a friend the more faithfully for believing him maligned. We must hope it may not prove bad as you fear, Miss Carteret."

At least there was comfort in the fact that he had not totally ignored her cause for fear, as Vane had done. There was comfort to Nora, also, in the knowledge that one person beside herself did not "take particularly" to Owen Dare. All the rest, the colonel, Mrs. Grahame, Vane himself, considered Dare immaculate.

"Sir Rupert!" It was Mrs. Grahame, gliding up to interrupt their *tele-a-tele*. "Here are some of my guests absolutely complaining they have not had a glimpse of the English lion yet. Nora, if you must monopolize Sir Rupert, you should choose a more prominent position, and so gratify the laudable curiosity of our friends. Indeed, I must veto sequestration such as this."

And Mrs. Grahame swept the baronet away from the quiet corner to take up the role he protested against—the lion of the evening. She was back, however, in a moment, before Nora had stirred from the retired spot.

"What has Sir Rupert been saying all this time, Nora?" she asked, sinking down into the vacant place. The natural falling of the sex, inquisitiveness, was about the only failing which strict conventionality had not crushed out of that exemplary matron. She also had a very thorough respect for aristocracy, titled aristocracy in particular, and aside from her favoritism for Dare, nothing could have proved more gratifying than for "the fairest debutante of the season, Miss Carteret, so ably chaperoned by the stylish Mrs. Grahame, you know," to make the brilliant match of the season by securing this wealthy nobleman.

"Well, for one thing, we were speaking of Vane."

"Really, Nora, it would appear in better taste if you did not so persistently make that unhappy young man the chief subject of your conversation. You may rue your open—hem!—regard for him sooner than you can suppose now."

"It appears to me that Vane is much the better for his association with Sir Rupert."

"Simply the reflex of what association with a gentleman of Sir Rupert's culture and standing cannot fail to impart, no matter how unworthy the object may be. I have it from the best authority that Vane is in desperate danger of winding up his own career on the shortest possible notice. He is getting himself hopelessly involved again, and as patience cannot last forever, he will very probably find the colonel's quite exhausted by this time."

"Your 'best authority' being, I presume, Mr. Owen Dare. That incomparable individual, as it chanced, formed the chief topic of our conversation on this occasion."

"A much more proper subject than the other, my dear. I can imagine you finding plenty to say of Owen Dare. Well?"

"Reversing his own particular rule, it was nothing good of him. Sir Rupert apparently

agrees with me in my appreciation of the gentleman. When the bottom of these reports regarding Vane is sifted, if it ever be sifted, you will find Owen Dare blameless."

A moment after, when both ladies had deserted the half-concealed nook, a curst, faint, wavered and parted, and Owen Dare himself stepped from the snug concealment where he had listened to the whole free discussion of himself. The old adage that listeners hear no good of themselves was never more forcibly exemplified.

"Encouraging to a man of my hopes," thought Dare, following Nora's retreating form. "Positively, the little witch never looked lovelier than when she was denouncing me. And it will be a triumph I wouldn't willingly forego to break that fiery spirit to my own wishes. Sift to the bottom if you like, Miss Carteret, but never imagine Owen Dare so incautious as to be found there."

While many were rejoicing over the advent of Sir Rupert Archer, there were two seriously disconcerted by it—Dare himself, and Colonel Vivian. The first, not quite at ease before the honest, keen-eyed baronet, was bitter at knowing the other's depreciation of himself; a little fearful, too, of putting himself in league against the Sussex nobleman—before the end. But a glance at Nora was enough to nerve him. "Help me, my clever genius and best ally—the devil—against all the world for her and Thornhurst!" So thought Dare, shutting his teeth over what was an unuttered vow.

The colonel was influenced by no prejudices against the young Englishman. On the contrary, he was strongly impressed in his favor, and proud of such a friend for his son.

"But he'll be marrying Nora out of hand, confound him," the colonel mused, "and my plans knocked to nothing. I can't trust affairs to their own course, as I first intended. Vane must be brought to time, and that soon; this promise of the baronet's to go to Thornhurst makes it evident."

Between those two and all concerned it was a most unfortunate circumstance that Sir Rupert Archer was engaged to go out of town on the following day.

CHAPTER XII.

A PATENT PROPOSAL.

"THERE'S no denying that you've been going straight to the devil for the last three years, Vane. I can't say that I blame you so much for a little wildness. Young men of the day and your expectations manage to put in a pretty heavy crop of wild oats generally. But I tell you I've made up my mind, once for all, that you've come to the end of your tether."

"Quite a familiar remark, sir. This is the third time you have made it in the most decided manner."

The colonel had come to this interview firmly determined to be moderate, to keep his unruly temper in check, and already that inflammable attribute was ready to take fire on the smallest provocation.

"I'll be hanged if you don't find that I mean it at last, sir. I've borne with your unflinching conduct, with your open disregard of my commands, for the last time, I tell you. I gave you an inkling of what my expectations were when we talked of these affairs before. I can't say whether you've proved yourself more obedient in keeping clear of these accursed gambling hells and throwing your betting book into the fire, as I very strongly advised, or if you have kept your own course and got into some new trouble since. For your own sake I prefer believing the former."

Colonel Vivian had a shrewd suspicion that Vane had not so completely reformed but his own favor might be of considerable importance at this present time. He had been indulgent; he had paid Vane's debts twice, and had sworn roundly that not one penny more of his should ever be devoted to the same purpose; but it was a characteristic of the colonel's never to mean one-fourth of what he said, and during the past night he had laid in his bed revolving how he might raise any obligations since incurred in a private way provided the young man fell in readily with his wishes. For the present he was willing to ignore the possibility of any demand upon him.

"It's quite time you are settled down for good, Vane. It's time, too, you are thinking of bringing a mistress to Thornhurst, and the two conditions will work smoothly together. Marry and settle, and be done with this rattle-brain period to which you have given full enough of your manhood."

"By Jove! you put it strong. Wouldn't one of those conditions be enough to begin with?"

"Be serious, Vane. I never was more earnest in my life than in proposing this. The sooner you are settled, the sooner Thornhurst gains the mistress it has long needed, the better for you and the more pleased I shall be."

"Since you appear to have bestowed thought upon the subject, sir, perhaps you have already selected a mistress for Thornhurst."

There was no mark, either of compliance or dissent, in that indolent tone of Vane's. He had a thorough respect for his father, but no fear of him, and had learned to meet his blistering moods in a non-committal, unpassioned manner which generally gained the best of their differences in the end.

"You are quite right, Vane. There is but one person I would willingly receive in that capacity. I had hoped you might make the discovery of her fitness for yourself, and spare my interposition. The one person is Nora, and I have set my whole heart on the consummation of this match."

"Very unwise, my dear father, to set your whole heart on anything in this vale of tears," said Vane, in that still provoking tone. "Marry Nora," he was thinking. "Well, why not? If he were only free of these Shylocks who would not spare one single drop of his heart's blood in pressing the fulfillment of their bonds, such a prospect as this father was proposing might have seemed quite as enticing as any other which could have presented. At three-and-twenty Vane Vivian honestly believed he had lived out all that was worth living; henceforth he might drag a tolerable existence with prime cigars, the best of old wine, a sight of the reigning prima donna now and then, and a yacht for summer sailing as the chief inspirations to make life endurable. A pretty, affectionate wife, such a bright little creature as Nora, would not be a bad addition to the list. It would hardly be just to her, Vane thought. He had taken that question home to himself before ever they came to Thornhurst at all. He thought of it in the cool, shadowy parlor of Thornhurst, that sunny October day of his home-coming. Nora had burst upon him, a bright, enticing vision even then; he had looked at her not unreasonably, probably of falling in love with her full in the face, and looked it down with the hard, stoical reasoning with which he was in the habit of crushing out his sentimental impulses."

A nice spirited little thing, one that he could admire in spite of his aversion to leonine looks, and one who was deserving of a far better fel-

low than he was apt to be for a husband. As to trifling with a natural thorough-bred like that, well, Dare had tried it on once, and seemed to have been worsted in his little game. No, he would look at and admire her as he might watch and admire a dainty, vivid, joyous humming-bird, culling its sweets from every fragrant flower, but as love and marriage were not for him, Nora Carteret was safe from all devotion at his hands. The situation reviewed itself before his mind as he sat there before his father. He was no more worthy of her now than then, not so worthy, indeed; he had been making a rapid descent over the road which leads the opposite way from heaven; he had not even paved the way with good intentions. By far the pleasantest time in the six weeks since they had come to town was the last fortnight, during which time, being much with Sir Rupert Archer, he had in a measure cut adrift from those dangerous pleasures that had been wonderfully potent with him, for three years past. But Nora had learned a truer appreciation of him in this time. Mrs. Grahame had not left her in ignorance of his faults and follies, to call them by no harsher name, and she had exhibited faith in him after all. Suppose he should present himself just as he was, and as she knew him to be, ask her to take him for better or worse, and make no strenuous efforts to bias her inclination? Would that be doing her any injustice? Something more than his usual warmth beat into Mr. Vivian's heart, as he was inclined to reason a negative.

Unlucky that the colonel's temper gained the ascendancy again. He was aggrieved at Vane's apparent indifference, impatient at his long silence, indignant at the slight it seemed to reflect upon his ward.

"It takes you a long time to make up your mind, Vane. Perhaps it will help you to consider that beggars can't be choosers, and that is the interesting condition you will arrive at unless you show some evidence of regaining good sense speedily. Do you suppose I am going to have Thornhurst squandered away by a roistering, dissolute vagabond? I've been too lenient with you before now. You've come to think you can turn the thumbscrews on me to extort anything through this foolish fondness I've indulged too long. By heavens, if you were twice my son and a thousand times more important than you are, you should turn a now leaf to your account right speedily. Take it this way, then—Nora is the mistress of Thornhurst, and through her your only chance to it. Now, what do you say to my proposal, sir?"

There was a hot glow in the colonel's face, and his wrath had overcome all those good resolutions he had held at starting.

"I have this to say, sir, that it quite alters the case!" Vane was scarcely moved from his indifference, but there was an alteration in his voice which should have warned the other. But the colonel was in no condition now to take the warning.

"Ah! I thought so! You are sensible at least in admitting it just that frankly. It does alter the case, and it is to be hoped it may bring you to a proper consideration of all you have been within a hair's breath of losing. By George! I'd endow a foundling hospital or turn Thornhurst into a home for the distressed, before it should follow the hundred thousand going for the vicious debts with which you have managed to saddle yourself up to this time. Nora is by far the least objectionable alternative, I take it, and I'll be blamed if you seem to half appreciate your good luck, you puppy!" The colonel feeling himself secure in having gained his point, considered it safe to work himself into a white heat now. His wrath was of the effervescent kind, which having got the air, is bound to fizz itself away.

"I want to know, father, if you were quite sincere in what you said just now. Do you mean that you would really turn me out of my inheritance if I fall in this? I don't say that I deserve anything better, but can you mean that you will take another person to precede me in your heart and home, even with the balance of all my faults against me?"

"I mean to say that I shall leave Thornhurst and everything else that I possess to Nora, unless you come to time, marry her, and cut away completely from your past course. You're a lucky dog to save yourself by so fair a way. By Jove, I was in doubt for a time whether Nora would take up with such a good-for-nothing! I couldn't so much have blamed her, and she seemed anything but favorable with the hints of your goings-on which chanced to reach her."

A swift, an unworthy suspicion dashed into Vane's brain.

"Does Miss Carteret know of this plan of yours? Does she know of your conditions regarding Thornhurst?"

"Nora knows what my hopes are, and she does not know anything of my intended disposition of the property, failing their fulfillment. I haven't seen fit to tell her that, for Nora is too sensible a girl, I fancy, to throw herself away upon such a scapegrace as you would be left to yourself. Nora's by far too good for you, Vane."

"So much too good that I shall never make the attempt to drag her to my level. It would be a pity to spoil her enjoyment of Thornhurst by the single consideration she might find in me. Leave it to her by all means, cut me off with the traditional shilling; I deserve it. I have nothing to say in defense of myself, but I would no sooner try to win Nora Carteret through the mistaken impression that she can gain Thornhurst only by taking me than I would pay the price of Thornhurst by taking her."

Vane rose as he spoke, an indignant flush creeping into his cheek, his eyes lit, his lip curled. A slow purple succeeded the rubicund glow in the colonel's face.

"What do you say, sir?" he demanded, chokingly.

"That I decline the honor of offering myself as Miss Carteret's husband on any condition. She will be readily consoled by the fact of my unworthiness—and Thornhurst."

A volley broke from the lips of Colonel Vivian.

"By heavens, you scoundrel, you will regret this! And it is for this I've borne with you, for this I have built all my hopes for years! Go your own road; take the consequences, and confound you for the worst idiot this side of heaven!" Colonel Vivian did not mean to reflect upon the inhabitants of that celestial sphere, but he was inclined to profanity, and his tongue very often got the better of his discretion. "Take yourself out of my sight, sir. Never set your foot under roof of mine unless you come into possession of your senses and a proper idea of what a son's duty should be. Lord knows I've found small enough comfort through having a son."

"Spare yourself any further reproaches, sir. I shall not set foot within your doors without an invitation from you, rest assured."

He inclined his head and walked out of the room, upright as the old soldier himself.

"Be sure it will be long coming, you conceited donkey," the colonel flung after him.

"The dog, the insubordinate young hound! I'll break him! I'll see if I am to have defiance flung in my teeth, like this!"

Nora floated out from the drawing-room as Vane was striding past.

"Why, oh, why that dark'ning frown upon thy brow? Do stop a moment, Vane, if the breeze you are in will permit. I have got the dust we were to practice together."

Vane looked down at her with hard, flashing eyes. He was bitter against her at that moment. Her fair face was a fair mask hiding the mercenary spirit beneath; she had disliked him he remembered now; she had only changed of late, and he had really believed her the frank, childlike creature she seemed.

"I claim the honor of having played my last duet with Miss Carteret; let me hope so at least." He bowed slightly and passed on, ignoring the hand she had put out to him, leaving Nora hurt and wondering.

"He has been quarreling with the colonel," she thought, "but it is no reason he should cut me in that way. What has it been about, I wonder?"

She went back to her music, but it had suddenly lost its charm, and presently she left it to seek the colonel in the library where his interview with Vane had been held, and where he was raging yet like some angry old lion in a cage.

"What does this mean, I want to know, Colonel Vivian?" demanded Nora, from the doorway. "There, you needn't tell me; you've been quarreling with Vane. What for, I say?"

The colonel subsided as he always did in Nora's presence, throwing himself heavily into a chair.

"Is that you, child? Come in and shut that door if you like. My head is aching to split now that I think of it."

"I should think it would ache. Now then, what has the trouble been? It's shameful the way you will persist in provoking Vane; you won't even let him be good when he tries."

"The dickens I won't! He's a confounded puppy, Nora, and he don't deserve anything from you. Let him go to the devil—anywhere he likes, as I shall do."

"Now, guardian, you should never let your angry passions rise, you know. Vane may not deserve anything from me, but he does merit some toleration from you. Do you intend to tell me what the trouble has been, Colonel Seymour Vivian, or will you drive me to him? I am determined to know."

"I've done what I should have done ages ago, sent the rascal about his business. I'll have nothing more to do with the scapegrace. I wouldn't turn my hand over to save him from Sing Sing after this."

"But what has he done?"

"Defied all my wishes and gone directly against all my hopes, Nora. He has thrown away every chance I have given him to redeem himself, and now he betrays the last trust I placed in him. He's shaken all my plans; the insolent churl vows I may dishonor him before he'll marry you, Nora, and I'll do it, by George!"

"What? What is this you are talking about, Colonel Vivian?" The slender form straightened, the brown eyes looked amazement full upon him.

"I—hem!—you know what I have hoped for you and Vane, Nora. Lisa Grahame said she hadn't a doubt you would throw yourself away upon him, and I—well, I was sure you cared enough for me if not for him to do it; but he don't deserve even a thought from me. There's a damned sight better fish in the sea than's never been caught."

"Colonel Vivian, do you mean you have been trying to dispose of me without ever asking my consent? In that case I must be eternally grateful to your son for refusing me. You must tell me just how the case stands, and you must make it up with Vane if this quarrel has been on my account. Marry him to me against his will, or with it, for that matter. Thank you, Colonel Vivian, but I never could think of agreeing to such a patent, ready-made marriage, not if I die an old maid, and I do abhor old maids."

(To be continued—commenced in No. 262.)

Overland Kit:

OR,

THE IDYL OF WHITE PINE.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

AUTHOR OF "WITCHES OF NEW YORK," "WOLF
DEMON," "WHITE WITCH," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER VII.

DICK TALBOT'S GRAVE.

DICK entered the little shanty, which only contained one room, lighted the candle, and then looked around him. The apartment contained a table, two rude chairs and three shoeboxes with a blanket spread over them—the boxes served for a bed.

Dick sat down on the rude couch and meditated.

"What demon was it that sent this woman here?" he muttered, a cloud of his handsome face. "I'm in for a run of ill-luck, I suppose, and the best—the only way to avoid it, is to run from it. That is the only thing. Bright and early in the morning I'll bid Spur City good-by for some little time. I'll go to some mining-camp higher up in the mountains; find some place where she won't be able to follow me. I shall have to leave Jimmie, though. That's too bad! The girl loves me. I think that she'd die for my sake, and the other one—" He did not finish the sentence, but remained silent for a moment, staring blankly at the whitewashed wall before him.

"If I think of her longer I shall go mad!" he muttered, in agony. "To-morrow the canyon and the pines shall hide me from her sight. No more Spur City for Injun Dick while this girl remains here. I wish I could forget her. I suppose that I sha'n't sleep much to-night for thinking of her."

Then he arose and paced restlessly up and down the floor for a few minutes.

"I must forget!" he murmured; "I wonder if Jim left any spirits here?"

He went to one corner of the room and lifted up a loose board; from the cavity under it he drew a bottle. He held it up to the light and examined it.

"Good! there's some whisky left!" he exclaimed, in a tone of satisfaction. Then he filled a large tin cup that stood on the table with the potent spirits.

"It's strange; at any other time I couldn't bear the taste of a drop of this, but now, I can drain it off like water. It's had enough, too, to burn a hole through a man's throat. If it will only make me sleep and forget, that's all I ask of it."

Then he drank off the fiery spirits at a single swallow. The strength of the poisonous draught brought tears to his eyes. Soon Talbot began to feel the effects of the dram in his brain.

"It's going to work!" he muttered; "the dose is strong and had enough to affect me. I began to have an idea that my head was cast-iron to-night. I shall sleep; I feel sleepy already. That cursed stuff is making my brain reel like a top."

And it was no wonder, for he had swallowed a good half-pint at one draught.

With an unsteady step, Dick blew out the candle, and, in the darkness, groped his way to the boxes that were to serve him as a bed for the night.

Lying down upon the rude couch, he drew the blanket over him and closed his eyes.

The fumes of the whisky had fired his brain, and strange, fantastic forms seemed to be dancing around him in the darkness.

In the strange excitement that he had labored under, he had never thought to fasten the door of the shanty after him.

Finally, overcome by the power of the liquor he had swallowed, he fell into a restless sleep—a sleep in which the scenes of the night came back to him with terrible earnestness, yet disordered and uncertain.

Again he saw the golden-brown hair and dark blue eyes of Bernice; again the vision of the "heart-woman" floated threateningly before him, but, by his side, like a guardian angel, the girl of the Eldorado saloon stood; her red-gold hair floated carelessly in the wind and waved around her head like the holy circle of light that crowned the locks of the saints of old.

Then around his bedside, stole dark and lowering forms with stealthy tread.

The golden-haired maid vanished in affright. Talbot would have stretched out his arms to have detained her, but some unknown power linked his wrists together and he could not separate them. He attempted to cry out, but a damp substance that seemed of spongy texture was pressed upon his nostrils. A strange, subtle perfume floated on the air. It entered his head and ascended to the brain. A thousand stars twinkled before his eyes; his head whirled round and round like a gigantic wheel, then came a sudden explosion—an explosion without noise, but producing endless showers of fiery sparks, and then—was still.

"Is this death?" Talbot questioned to himself. His mind was in a maze.

He felt a cool wind playing upon his temples, a rough jolting, too, as if he was being conveyed in a wagon over an uneven road. He tried to open his eyes; he succeeded, but darkness still was before him. The truth flashed upon his bewildered brain; he was blindfolded. He essayed to raise his hands to tear the bandage from his eyes, but found that they were bound together at the wrists, and some unknown power held them down.

It did not take Injun Dick long to guess what had happened. Part of the frightful dream was reality. Dark forms had stood around him. They had bound his hands together, stupefied him by some powerful drug, placed upon a sponge and pressed against his nostrils. Then he had been placed in a wagon and now was being carried—where? That riddle he could not guess.

Suddenly the wagon halted. Powerful arms bore Dick from the wagon and placed him upon his feet.

Talbot guessed that the end of this mysterious proceeding was at hand.

"Let him see," said a stern voice.

The bandage that had been placed over his eyes was suddenly removed, and Talbot stared around him in wonder.

Six men surrounded him, all clad in long black cloaks and wearing black masks, through which shone gleaming eyes. Each one of the masked men—except the one taller than the rest, who seemed to be the chief and confronted Talbot—held in his hand a six-shooter, cocked and leveled full at Injun Dick's breast.

A single glance told Talbot where he was. He stood upon the crest of one of the ridges that looked down upon Spur City from the north-west. A mile or so in the distance he could see the waters of the Reese river, rippling silver in the moonlight. Between him and the mining-camp was a little clump of pines; at his back the mountain ridges rose to meet the sky, and down upon the strange scene shone the full, round moon.

"What do you mean by this masquerading folly?" asked Talbot, scornfully. "Do you think to frighten me by child's play?"

"Silence, prisoner!" cried the chief of the masked men, sternly.

"Prisoner?" demanded Talbot, not a whit afraid.

"Yes, you are now standing before your judges," replied the masked man.

"And who are you that dare to constitute yourselves my judges?" asked Talbot, defiantly.

"The Vigilantes!"

For a moment a nervous look shot over the face of Talbot, but in a second it was gone.

"You lie!" he said, boldly. "The Vigilantes don't come in secret disguise. If you are anything, you are a band of masked assassins."

"Bold words will avail you but little. Listen to the charge," said the chief, calmly.

"You are Dick Talbot, commonly called Injun Dick, gambler, cheat and bully."

"You lie!" cried Talbot, fiercely; "if I had my hands free, you would not dare to say such words to my teeth. I play cards, true; few men in Spur City, or from here to the Pacific, that do not. I am no cheat, but play a square game and wrong no man out of his gold-dust. If I win, it is because Heaven has given me brains; perhaps I don't use them as I ought to, but, that's my affair. I'll have to answer that hereafter, not on this earth. As for being a bully, that's a falsehood. There don't stand a man on this earth to-day that can truthfully say that I ever picked a quarrel with him. I have used the strength and skill that nature has given me to protect myself, and I've taken the part, too, of a little man against a big one. If you call this acting the bully, then I am one."

"Dick Talbot, look down at your feet," said the chief, in the same cold, calm voice as before.

Talbot obeyed the command.

"Well?"

"What do you see there?"

"I see a hole in the ground that looks as if it was dug for a grave."

"You have guessed right; it is your grave."

"Mine?"

"Yes, unless you swear to leave this valley before the sun sets to-morrow."

"See here!" cried Dick boldly; "perhaps I've trod on the toes of some of you gents. You want revenge. I'll give you a fair shake for it, that is, if you've got any manhood about you. Unbind my hands; give me a revolver and fifty foot start. I'll stand my ground and fight the whole six of you."

"Judges do not fight with prisoners," sternly replied the chief.

"No, nor cowardly bounds like you, when you meet a man who doesn't value his life more than a brass button in a good fight," returned Talbot, bitterly.

"Will you leave Spur City?"

"Never, until I'm carried out of it feet first, or a regular association of the citizens tell me that my presence is unwelcome. Then, I'll go. But the power of men who are afraid to show their faces I laugh at. I was going to leave the rancho to-morrow, anyway; but now, since you come to threats, two can play at that game. Make me go if you can!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAWYER'S GUESS.

WITH a calm face and an undaunted bearing, Talbot faced the masked men.

"You defy our power, then, and refuse to go?" the chief of the six asked.

"Yes, that's about the English of it," Dick replied.

"Dick Talbot, your life is at our mercy, but we will not take it at present. This is but a warning. We give you three days to leave Spur City. At the end of that time death will surely come if you defy our power, disregard our warning, and remain."

"You've trapped me this time, but you'll never get a second chance at me, I can tell you that," Dick said, scornfully.

"We'll run the risk of that," the masked man replied, dryly. Then he made a signal.

One of the masked men stepped forward and replaced the bandage over Talbot's eyes.

Again Injun Dick was lifted from his feet by the strong arms, and replaced in the wagon that stood a little distance off.

Talbot felt the jolting motion of the wagon descending the hill. Then the damp sponge was pressed against his nostrils. He did not attempt resistance; he knew that it would be useless; but he strove to resist the subtle influence of the drug; his will was powerful, but the drug more powerful still.

Little by little he felt that his senses were leaving him; his head swam round; again he saw the shower of sparks, felt the motion of the whirling wheel, and then—all was blank.

When Talbot's senses came back to him, and he opened his eyes, the morning sun was shining in through the little window of the shanty. He lay on his back on the rude couch, just as he had cast himself down to sleep the night before.

With a vacant look, Talbot gazed around him. For a moment he believed all the events of the night had taken place in dreamland, but as he turned his head around, from the blanket on which his head lay, came the peculiar odor of the drug that had been administered to him.

Slowly, Talbot rose to a sitting posture. There was a strange, odd feeling about his head; a sort of dull, throbbing pain.

"It's no dream!" he muttered; "they dosed me well last night. Get up and get, eh? Not if I know myself!" and he compressed his lips firmly as he spoke.

"This is going to be an awful run of luck, just as I expected. I had made up my mind to 'levant,' and now I'm forced to stay. Bad cards run the best player; what can a man do against luck? They shan't frighten me out of the rancho, though. There's some deep game under all this."

For a few minutes Talbot sat, motionless, his eyes fixed upon the ground, his mind busy in thought.

"Vigilantes!" he exclaimed, suddenly; "not much! Those fellows last night were more like Overland Kit's band than like the members of a vigilance committee. Who is there in Spur City that would profit by my absence? That's the question. Let me discover that, and then I can discover who those fellows were last night. They played their game right up to the hilt. I didn't think that there was a man living that could catch me napping, but it's been done. The voice of the chief seemed familiar to me. I'll just look round quietly to-day and see if I can't spot him."

Talbot looked at his watch.

"Five o'clock," he said; "I'll take a little walk up the valley, just to clear my head."

He rose to his feet. "It's in the cards that I must stay in Spur City—that I must meet this woman whom I ought to fly from."

Dick left the shanty and strolled leisurely up the valley. His eyes were fixed upon the ground, his face overcast with thought.

Talbot was not the only early riser, for, as he walked up the river bank, a young man, apparently about his own age, clad in the rough garb of a miner, came along down.

He was a good-looking young fellow, though rather thin-visaged, with grayish eyes and curling brown hair.

"Good-morning," said the stranger, halting when he came up to Talbot; his voice betrayed the gentleman; "did you see the coach from Austin come in last night?"

"Yes," replied Talbot. The questioner was unknown to him.

"Was there a lady on board?"

"Yes," again replied Talbot; he was rather astonished at the question.

"A young, pretty girl and an elderly, white-haired gentleman?" said the stranger.

"Yes; they're stopping at the Eldorado."

"Thank you," and the stranger passed on.

Here was more food for thought for Injun Dick. What had this young man to do with the "heart-woman," and how did he know that she was coming to Spur City?

The stranger proceeded at once to the Eldorado.

The heathen Chinese was just proceeding to clean out the place when the young man arrived at the saloon.

Of him the young man proceeded to inquire if the old gentleman who had come in the coach the night before had arisen yet.

But, just as the stranger was endeavoring to make the faithful Ah Ling understand what he wanted, the old lawyer entered the saloon.

The recognition between the two was extremely cordial, and no wonder, for they were father and son! The young man was James Rennet, who, educated for a lawyer by his father, had hung out his shingle in Frisco, as the metropolis of the golden state is generally termed in the Far West, got into a little scrape there, and had "absquatulated" to the mining region to avoid unpleasant consequences.

"Bless my soul, James! You do look rough enough!" exclaimed the old lawyer, surveying the bronzed face and whiskered chin of his son in astonishment.

"Sluice mining don't improve a man's looks," the son replied.

"Bless me! you're as brown as an Indian."

"Sun and wind and hard work."

"You look like a bushwhacker."

"Kid gloves and 'billed' shirts don't do for this region; there's only one man in this camp that wears a white shirt. I just met him as I came up the street; I knew him by his shirt, though I never happened to meet him before—Dick Talbot, the gambler."

"But who washes his shirts if nobody else wears them?" asked the old lawyer, glancing down at his own soiled shirt-bosom as he spoke.

"The Heathen Chinese here," the son answered.

swore; "he came here originally as a washer-woman, but the poor devil nearly starved for want of custom. You see, dad, a man here puts on a flannel shirt and wears it until it wears out."

"A nice region this is for a gentleman to come to," old Rennet said, in disgust. "But come, walk down the street with me; break fast will not be ready for some time, they tell me, and I have something important to say to you."

"All right."

The two proceeded down the street. Spar City was just beginning to get up—we mean, of course, the inhabitants of the mining camp.

"You received my letter telling you of my intention to visit this place with Miss Gwynne?"

"Yes," the son replied, "on a wild-goose chase after Patrick Gwynne."

"Exactly; young girls take queer notions in their heads sometimes."

"Well, this one is queer enough. Why, the chances are ten to one that this Patrick is dead and buried long ago."

"By-the-by, James," said the father, suddenly, "you wrote me that you were obliged to leave San Francisco, but you didn't explain the reason for so doing. I suppose some sort of a scrape, eh?"

"That's about the size of it, dad," replied the son, coolly. "But don't ask any questions; it isn't much of a scrape, anyway, only I didn't care about coming East from Frisco in a pine coffin, so I went off between two days, as the saying is. I couldn't make my salt as a lawyer, anyway; the professions are overdone on the Pacific coast; they want red-shirted workmen out here, not black-coated gentlemen."

"That's the case in all new countries; but now to business. You remember Bernice Gwynne, of course?"

"Well, yes; I suppose I should know her if I should see her; I was never intimate with her, dad," the son replied.

"She is the heiress of her uncle's wealth as well as of that left by her own father; but she is determined never to touch a single penny of her uncle's property until she discovers whether his son, her cousin, Patrick Gwynne, is living or dead."

"So you wrote me."

"Of course it's only the whim of a foolish young girl. Now, I've been thinking over a little scheme. So far we haven't been able to discover the slightest trace of this Patrick Gwynne, except that when our coach was stopped by this road-agent, Overland Kit, last night, he put his head in at the window of the coach, apparently recognized Bernice, and pronounced her name. The thought occurred to me at once that he might be Patrick Gwynne."

"But then, again, it might be some one else who had known her in New York," James suggested; "it's astonishing how men from the East go to the bad here sometimes. Besides, this Overland Kit, from what I have heard of him, don't answer to Patrick Gwynne at all. Gwynne, as I remember him ten years ago, was a slight-built fellow with brown hair, good deal such a sort of man as this gambler, Dick Talbot, while the road-agent is a swarthy fellow, with jet-black hair and beard—a regular desperado."

"Yes, that's true," the old lawyer said, thoughtfully; "but now for my scheme."

CHAPTER IX.

A HUSBAND FOR BERNICE.

THE old lawyer looked around him carefully, as if to assure himself that no one was within earshot.

The son looked at the father in astonishment; he couldn't imagine what the scheme of the old lawyer could be.

"Of course you are aware that this girl, Bernice Gwynne, is worth a great deal of money?"

"Yes," the son replied.

"I take it for granted, either that Patrick Gwynne is dead, or else gone to the bad so utterly that he will never dare to return to New York."

"That is very probable."

"Now, Bernice has a very strong will of her own; she will never be satisfied until she discovers what has become of Patrick Gwynne."

"That is very probable, also," James said, thoughtfully. "When a woman of her style once gets an idea into her head, it's deuced hard work to get it out again."

"Exactly; I do not suppose that any reasoning could induce Bernice to return to New York, until she had fully satisfied her mind in regard to Patrick. Now, as it is very improbable that she will succeed in learning anything about him, and as I have had about enough of this delightful country, I have formed a plan to induce Bernice to give up her wild-goose chase, and return contentedly to New York."

"What is the plan?"

"To have you stumble upon us—just by chance, you know—and tell the story of the death of Patrick Gwynne up in some wild mining region. Say he was attacked and killed by Indians, or eaten up by a grizzly bear."

"That's a good idea."

"Yes; as you are a living witness that he is dead, of course she will be satisfied, and will then return to New York, and take possession of her property."

"Well, now, dad, that's a 'cute idea of yours," James said, in admiration.

"It's not bad, but I have another one still better," the old lawyer said, complacently.

"In regard to Bernice?"

"Yes; she is a great heiress; a fine catch for some young man, and I had an idea, James, that it would be a good thing for you to lay siege to her. You haven't been very successful so far, but, if you could succeed in winning her, it would be a masterpiece."

"That's a capital idea, dad!" the son exclaimed.

"Pretty fair—pretty fair," the old lawyer chuckled, rubbing his hands together softly.

"There's only two things that might upset the calculation. In the first place, the young lady might not take a fancy to me; and, in the second place, neither Miss Gwynne nor myself profess the Mormon faith," the son said, coolly.

"What the deuce has that to do with it?" asked old Rennet, in astonishment.

"Bigamy, dad, you know, is ugly."

"And as I've got one wife already, I think that it will be advisable to get rid of her before I take a second."

"You don't mean to say that you're married?" exclaimed the father, in astonishment.

"Well, I am," James replied, coolly. "You see, dad, I had an office over a little millinery shop; the young female that run the institution was deuced pretty, and I fell in love with and married her. I thought that she was an angel; after marriage, I found her quite the reverse. Why, dad, I was really glad when I got into the little unpleasantness that made 'levanting' necessary."

"You might get a divorce," suggested the father.

"I'm very much obliged to you for the idea, but if I am to get a divorce for the purpose of marrying again, I think that I would rather be excused. Six weeks gave me enough of married life to suffice me for as many years, if not for a lifetime," replied James.

"How very unfortunate!" exclaimed the old lawyer. "Just think, James, if you had won the heiress, you and I could have had the handling of all her money."

"It is rather unfortunate," the son remarked, thoughtfully.

"Oh, terrible!"

"By Jove, dad!" exclaimed James, suddenly, "I've got it!"

"An idea?"

"Yes."

"To secure this money?"

"That's my game. You see, father, if I can't marry the heiress, somebody else can."

"Well, of course I know that."

"But if the man that marries her is our man, bound to act according to our instructions, why, the result will be just the same as if I married Bernice."

"That's very true," replied the old lawyer; "but the chief point is to find such a man."

"He is already found; a chum of mine up in Gopher Gulch; a regular man of wax; will do just as I say."

"Yes, but is he the sort of man to win the love of a young and high-spirited girl like Bernice?"

"You bet!" as we say in Frisco. He's a good looking fellow; comes of a good family East, but he's one of those weak, wavering sort of men—easily influenced. He's a gentleman, though."

"What's his name?"

"Gaius Tendam; but up in the Gully we've shortened his name down into 'Gay.'"

"You think that he will agree to aid us?"

"Not a doubt of it," the son replied, confidently. "He'll never make his fortune as a miner; he's one of the unlucky kind."

"Well, I'll rely on you entirely in the affair. The first thing is to convince Bernice that Patrick Gwynne is dead."

"I'll do that. I'll swear that I saw him go under with my own eyes, and afterward agreed to bury him. Of course, after we get him under ground, that settles him," James said, with a laugh.

"I can't help thinking of this Overland Kit, as they call him," the old lawyer said, suddenly. "The very moment he saw Bernice's face, he pronounced her name. Just then the soldiers came up, and he had to run for it."

"Well, even if he is Patrick Gwynne, he'll never dare to declare himself to Bernice; and of course she would turn in horror from such an outlaw. I don't believe that he is Gwynne, though. There's a rumor among the miners that the road-agent is one of the Government officials; there's no telling any thing about it; it's only talk; but it may be true."

"He's a reckless fellow, whoever he is," observed the old lawyer. "But we had better turn back," and he halted as he spoke.

The two had proceeded some distance beyond the borders of the town. A heavy growth of pines skirted the rude road. Father and son had little idea that, concealed by the trees and rocks, a spy had followed in their path, eagerly trying to overhear their conversation."

The two turned and commenced to retrace their steps, still conversing together and arranging the details of their scheme.

The spy did not attempt to follow them. He waited, hid behind the pines, until an angle in the road hid them from his eyes. Then he stepped out into the road.

A single glance at the jet-black hair and beard, the resolute face, and one could have told that it was Overland Kit, the road-agent, who had played the spy upon the plotters.

"So you think Overland Kit is Patrick Gwynne, do you?" he murmured, looking in the direction of the town. "And you are going to rob the heiress, Bernice, of some of her wealth? Her money must pass through your hands; some of it will stick in the passage, I'm afraid. I must be off for the mountains. I'll take measures to have a finger in this pie myself."

With a tread as stealthy and as noiseless as an Indian warrior tracking his prey, the road-agent passed through a clump of pines. A hundred paces onward he came to where the rock rose upward like a wall.

Skirting the base of the rock, Kit proceeded northward.

He went on like one well accustomed to the way. In a thousand yards or so he came to where a gully broke the wall of the rock. It was the path of a watercourse. At some remote period a stream had poured down into the Reese, but now the rocks only felt the kiss of the water in the springtime when the snow melted on the mountain peaks.

The road-agent turned into the gully. A group of pines growing at the mouth of the canyon concealed it from view.

Just around the corner of the rock, at the entrance, stood a horse. The four "white stockings" and the broad blaze in the forehead told that it was the famous steed of the road-agent, reputed to be the fastest horse that had ever planted a hoof in the Reese river valley.

The horse whinnied with delight when she beheld her master approach.

"So-ho, old girl!" he muttered, patting the arching neck of the mare; "are you glad to see me, beauty? Well, there's two in this world that care a little for me, outcast and villain as I am."

There was an expression of sadness in the deep voice of the outlaw.

"You've saved my life many a time, old girl," he continued. "I wonder if Judge Jones planned that attack last night? I'm afraid that the Judge and I will have to come to a settlement before long. If I know anything of human nature, he's a greater villain, by far, than I am. How lucky that I overheard the conversation between this precious pair. I was in the dark as to the reason of Bernice's visit here. I was never more astonished in my life than when I saw her in the coach last night. Poor girl, she's on a fruitless quest!"

Kit, with a bound, vaulted into the saddle. Carefully the intelligent mare picked her way down the rough bed of the watercourse, passed through the little group of pines, gained the road, and then, obedient to her rider's hand, galloped off to the northward.

An hour's ride and Kit turned to the left and entered a dark canyon, the pines on the brink of which almost shut out the sunlight.

The canyon was the entrance to the mountain retreat of the road-agents.

(To be continued—commenced in No. 263.)

How earthy old people become—moldy as the grave. Their wisdom smacks of the earth; there is no foretaste of immortality in it. They remind one of earth-worms and mole-crickets

calling Queen Victoria by her Christian name, had they chanced to meet her, as the stately and cold little Albino.

"No, my dear! She was merely warning me about the weather."

"Why, what ails the weather?"

"Nothing that I can see, Miss Forest, though, it seems, has had private information from the clerk of the weather, that it is going to rain."

"And we will have a thunder-storm before long," said D'Arville, whose eyes had been dreamily fixed on the graceful figure of the lady before him hitherto, lifting them now to the sky. "Look at that cloud!"

"Oh, it will blow over! Don't predict evil! Sorrow's soon enough when it comes."

"I wonder what Senor Mendez is saying to Eve," exclaimed Hazel. "How devoted he looks, and how he bends down to catch every word! What shines these old fellows do take to girls, now and then!"

"Senor Mendez is not old," said Mr. Schaffer, blidly, glancing sideways at D'Arville, whose brows were contracting. "He is a fine-looking man, and in the prime of life. When do you suppose Miss Eve will go to live in her castle in Spain, Hazel?"

"Shortly, I should think, for it is a mutual strife."

"Indeed! has she told you so?"

"Oh, ha! no! Catch Eve talking about such a thing, but I know the symptoms, you see," said Hazel, gravely, "and—goodness me! how dark it's getting!"

"We are in for a wetting! Miss Forest was right, after all," said D'Arville. "Listen to that!"

It was a sharp and sudden peal of thunder, followed by a vivid flash of lightning, and great drops of rain. The whole face of the sky had blackened with astonishing rapidity, and the storm was upon them in its fury. Worst of all they had been riding fast, and had left the village behind them, and were out now on a lonely country road, with no house in sight.

Hazel gave a little shriek of dismay.

"Good gracious, Paul! whatever will we do! It's going to pour down straight, and I've got my new hat on!"

But one step from the sublime to the ridiculous, but it was only human nature—a girl's first idea in a tempest is about her hat.

Before Paul could offer consolation, there was another deafening thunder-clap, another sheet of flame, a rush of rain, another wild shriek from Hazel, and a cry from D'Arville.

The horses of the pair before them had taken fright, at least the gentleman's had, and was flying off like mad; and the lady's, startled by the proceeding, was dashing off at full speed after it. It was quite evident Eve had lost all management of her steed, only a half-tamed thing at best.

"She will be thrown! she will be killed!" shouted Paul Schaffer, excitedly, "and Mendez cannot help her. Great heavens! she is down!"

It was true; the frightened animal had thrown her, and was away like the wind. D'Arville, his face perfectly white with horror, dashed the spurs into his horse, and in five seconds after had vaulted off and lifted the prostrate form in his arms, with a passionate cry:

"Eve, my darling! My darling, are you killed?"

No; or if she was, his words had magic power to charm her back to life, for the dark eyes slowly opened and looked up in his face with her whole heart in their depths. In a rapture he bent over her, reading it all.

"Thank God! Oh, thank God, she lives still! My darling, are you hurt?"

Her face was perfectly colorless, and there was blood upon it, but she forced a smile and made an effort to rise. But he held her fast, though the other two were riding up.

"Eve, they are here—one word before they come. You know I love you!"

Yes, she knew it. One little hand still in his, one other glance from the dark eyes, and he was a happy man. The other two were beside them, with faces of consternation, and the rain was coming down in torrents.

"Oh, Eve! are you much hurt?" was Hazel's shrill cry, forgetting all about her new hat.

"Set me up, please, and I will see," Eve said, faintly, smiling up in D'Arville's face.

My head struck something; but I think, on the whole, I was more frightened than hurt."

She stood up as she spoke, very pale, and with the blood flowing from the cut in the forehead, but with no broken bones.

"Thank Heaven, it is so well!" exclaimed D'Arville; "but, Eve, what are we to do with you? It won't mend matters to stand in this downpour."

"Eve!" Paul Schaffer's keen glance flashed from one to the other; and read the whole story. It was the first time Claude D'Arville had ever called her other than "Miss Hazelwood."

"There is a house over there," said Hazel, pointing. "Let Eve take your horse, Monsieur D'Arville, and we will be under cover in no time."

"An excellent idea. Miss Eve, let me assist you to mount!"

"But you, Eve hesitated, "you will be exposed to all this rain!"

"It is of no consequence about me, I won't melt! Here, up with you!"

Eve mounted his horse, and bent down to him as she gathered up the reins.

"You will hurry after us," she said, anxiously, and his answer was the bright smile that so vividly lit up his dark, handsome face.

"Yes, I will hurry. Off with you now."

They dashed off, leaving him to follow on foot, and in five minutes were at the house. It was a sort of wayside inn, and held other storm-bound wayfarers it seemed; for a gentleman stood in the open doorway, watching the storm.

He drew back as the young ladies, with uplifted skirts, skimmed past him into the parlor, and Eve thought of Paul Schaffer's description of the lord of Black Monks—

"grave and middle-aged, tall and stately, gentlemanly and rather distinguished-looking"—and made up her mind that this was Lord Landsdowne. The parlor was tenanted, too, in a leather easy-chair in the chimney-corner a lady sat—a lady richly dressed in silk and velvet, with diamonds flashing on her white hands, whose haughty and handsome face Eve had seen before. It was Lady Landsdowne, Eve remembered the proud, cold face, framed in golden-brown hair, that had looked from the carriage window that first evening in Monkswood village. She was dressed in walking costume now; her blue velvet mantle falling off her sloping shoulders, the dainty bonnet, a snow-flake, sprinkled with azure, still on her head. She had been looking into the fire, her brow contracted in an impatient frown when they entered, and the first glance had been careless and supercilious enough. But that glance changed, fixed, grew wild and amazed, and the bright blue eyes dilated on Eve as if she had been a ghost. There had been a stifled cry, too, and a half-bow from her chair, but she sunk back as the eyes of the trio turned on her in wonder. Her face, her very

lips had turned ashen white, and her blue eyes still were riveted on Eve's face, with a look none present could comprehend. What was there in that beautiful face to inspire that look of fear, of affright, of positive horror? Paul Schaffer made a step toward her.

"Madam, you are ill—you are—"

The sound of his voice was magical. She started to her feet at once.

"Yes," she said, sharply, "you have startled me. I cannot bear the sight of blood! What is the matter with that young lady?"

"She has had a fall from her horse and has cut her forehead. I regret that our entrance should have so disturbed you."

The lady's only reply to Mr. Schaffer's civil speech was to gather up her mantle and sweep past him to the door, with a stormy rustling of silk. There the gentleman in waiting met her with an inquiring face.

"Has the carriage not come yet, my lord?" she demanded, in the same sharp tone.

"Oh, isn't she a Satan!" Hazel whispered to Eve.

"Not yet," the gentleman answered. "It will be here presently, though."

"I want to go," said the lady, still more sharply. "I don't choose to sit in a room crowded with people. Who are those persons who have just entered?"

"Civil that—upon my word!" exclaimed Hazel, whistling, while Eve's eyes flashed.

"My dear," they heard the gentleman say, in a low tone, "they are most respectable. They are the Hazels. You had better wait."

"I don't choose to wait any longer," the lady, almost passionately, cried. "I shall go if I have to walk, sooner than sit among such a crowd! Go and see if the people who keep this place have no sort of conveyance at all that will take us home!"

"Here is the carriage, at last!" exclaimed the gentleman, in a tone of intense relief. And as he spoke, a handsome carriage, drawn by handsome horses, and with the arms of the Landsdowne family upon the panel, drew up before the door. Right after it came cantering a rider at a furious pace. It was Senor Mendez, in a state of intense excitement and anxiety about Eve. He had seen the horses at the door, and sprung from his saddle at once, and strode past Lord and Lady Landsdowne into the parlor.

"Eve—Miss Hazelwood—are you hurt? There is blood on your face!"

"It is nothing—only a scratch," Eve answered. "Are you sure you are quite safe yourself? I was a second edition of Mameppa or John Gilpin—I hardly know which."

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He took off his hat as he spoke, to fan himself, revealing his face for the first time to the pair without. As he did so, there was a wild shriek from the lady, a sudden reel forward, and something fell to the floor like a log.

The cry was echoed by the gentleman, and all rushed out. Lady Landsdowne had fainted, and was lying on the floor like a dead.

"The lady has fainted," said Senor Mendez, coolly. "Can we be of any assistance to your lordship?"

John, the coachman, obeyed, and Lord Landsdowne carried his lady in his arms, got her in with John's help, followed, and gave the order to drive home. Our party stood in the doorway until the carriage was out of sight.

"Is my lady mad, I wonder?" asked Paul Schaffer. "What made her faint?"

"And what made her scream and stare at Eve so when we came in?" asked Hazel. "She must want a square of being sound, or she would never cut up so."

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But Eve did not answer. She was watching a figure coming through the slanting rain, with a look at once tender and anxious in her eyes.

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It was after dark before they crossed the swell from which the motto could first be seen, and Old Bull's

THE FROG WHO WOULD BE AS BIG AS AN OX.

BY J. J. JOY, JR.

A frog once sat beside a pond
Engaged in deep reflection
He looked into the mud and thought
On "Natural Selection."
He thought on questions grave and deep—
Responsibilities human,
Wondering if the "Descent of Man"
Wasn't brought about by woman.

Thus pondering by that little pond,
His head all in a muddle,
He did not see an ox that came
To drink from out the puddle.
One hoof descending close to him
Out of his meditations,
And came in one of sending him
To join his dead relations.

Enraged, on his hind legs that frog
Danced round the ox in fury,
And shook his clenched fists at him
As a lawyer at a jury.
"Rantankerous brute," the frog shrieked out,
His teeth in mad champing,
"What do you mean by coming round
Near little people tramping?"

"If I could only find a rock
How quick I'd fling it at you!
Or could I only get a club
I'd go to work and bat you!
You thought because you're largely big
My back to put your foot on,
Oh, for a double-barreled gun!
Old ox I'd spoil your nation!"

"If it was just as big as you
How terribly I'd thrash you!"
He rolled his sleeves up in a rage,
How I would like to mash you!"
Then he began to puff himself,
Each moment growing bigger;
And truly looked much less a frog
Than an Indian-rubber figure.

"I'll grow to be three times your size,
And then we'll see who's worsted,
But his stretched hide had grown too thin—
At the next breath it bursted!
His last words were, 'Go, tell each man
Who may have large pretensions,
That he must never ape the frog,
But keep his own dimensions.'"

The Snow Hunters:
OR,
WINTER IN THE WOODS.BY C. DUNNING CLARK,
AUTHOR OF "YOUNG SEAL-HUNTER," "IN THE
WILDERNESS," "CAMP AND CANOE,"
"ROD AND RIFLE," ETC., ETC.IX.—"Calling" the Moose.—The Giants'
Battle.

JACK coolly laid two or three large sticks upon the fire. In spite of his danger the lad was steady, and was trying to satisfy himself whether he had better fire when the panther crept closer to the fire. The young hunter could not withstand the temptation; so, laying his knife on the rock by his side, he raised his rifle, steadily sighted between the flaring eyes and pulled the trigger. For a moment he was stunned by the report in the confined space, but he retained his senses enough to grasp his knife and hold it out before him. The next moment he was prostrated by the rush of a heavy body, and felt that his keen knife had penetrated to the hilt in the body of the panther. Expecting every moment to feel the terrible teeth and claws, he saw that the beast lay quietly upon its side.

"Rubbed out, as sure as I am Jack Edgel," he cried. "If I ain't having the best luck of any one—ah! There comes the old chap!"
He heard, far off, the scream of the male panther calling to his mate. Loading his rifle rapidly he replenished the fire and waited for the coming of the foe. He had not long to wait, for he heard the rattle of the sharp claws upon the hard rock, and the huge form of the male panther glided into the outer cavity.

"Come on, old chap!" cried Jack, as he hurled a blazing fragment at the newcomer. "Make yourself at home—do."
The panther leaped back out of reach and bounded out of the opening. Jack, now grown utterly reckless, dashed after him and arrived at the mouth of the cave just as the panther got over his first fright. As the muzzle of the rifle was thrust forward, the panther seized it in his white teeth, the muzzle resting against the roof of his mouth. Jack pulled the trigger at the right moment and the panther fell at his feet, his head literally blown to atoms.

"What took your roof off?" shouted Jack. "Hip, hip, hip, hooray! I guess I've cleaned out the family!"
He went back into the cave, pushed his fire out into the center, cooked the moose tongue which he had brought, and made a royal meal. This done, he blocked up the mouth of the cave with loose stones, replenished his fire, and slept soundly until morning. As he went out of the cave he heard near by the report of a rifle, and fired his own in return. Half an hour later he was joined by Dave Blodgett, who made the welkin ring with shouts of joy. They had not left the trail since they missed him and had found him at last.

The whole party quickly came up and crowded about Jack, as he exhibited the trophies of his skill—the two panthers and the living cub—which he had determined to keep alive. The hunters had "cached" their moose meat near the *ravage*, and taking the sled, had followed upon Jack's trail, led by the Indian, who had evinced the utmost anxiety for the safety of the boy. He now danced about Jack, rapturously, slapping him on the back with his open palm and striving in every way to show how delighted he was.

"I am almost willing to be lost again, for the sake of finding out whether I've got friends," said Jack, as he returned the boisterous greeting of the twins, and shook his uncle warmly by the hand. "I don't see what reason Alf has to like me, after all I have done."
"What me care!" roared Alf. "You take me—all good; me catchum good master *that* day. Bill Becker big heap fool, you much bet! You big chief one day, come up hunt, take Alf for guide, eh?"

"That's the kind of talk, Alf!" said Dave Blodgett. "I knowed you hed the clear grit even when you consorted with that besum of destruction, Bill Becker. Now we're all together an' in the thick of the moose kentry, I'm goin' to show ye a little sport of another kind. See yer, my Injun friend, kin ye call moose?"

Alf answered by so exact an imitation of the howling of the low moose that Jack involuntarily reached for his rifle.

"That's good!" said Dave, with a delighted chuckle. "That's the best I ever heard—that beats me. We'll hev another moose hunt to-day, of another kind."

They were all equipped with snow-shoes, and following closely on the heels of Alf, entered a sheltered bay in the woods, where the pine trees stood so thick that convenient covers could be readily formed in a dozen places. Here they took their stations, and Alf, stepping out into the open space, sent a loud, musical howling echoing through the forest. So well

was it done that it was heard at quite a distance, in the keen, frosty atmosphere. He repeated the call twice, when an answer came back from the distant forest.

"Come in, Alf," said Dave, quietly. "The old cuss hears yer musical voice, you bet."

Alf stepped back into the cover, and they waited quietly.
"He won't come," asserted Jack.
"That's it, little critter," said Dave. "It does beat all how consaty a boy gets when he has a trifle of good luck. Any other chap on airth would hev bin chawed inter minute fragments by them painters, but you scraped c'lar. Them moose won't come, eh?"

"I don't believe they will."
"It's flyin' in the face of Providence to prove anything to a critter like you," sighed Dave. "Hark to that, boy!"

The bellow of the moose was now heard close at hand, and Dave burst into a fit of chuckling from which he only roused himself to caution them all.

"Take keer now, boys. Thar ain't a more sp'icious animle on the airth than the moose. If a leaf stirs he's bound to find out what stirred it. Silent all."

Every one had cocked his rifle, and, resting on one knee, peered through the leafy cover for the giant game. The suspicious bull stopped soon, and Alf gave an imitation of the low grunting of the cow-moose, which took even Dave by surprise, and he looked at the Indian in mute admiration. A stentorian bellowing announced that the cautious animal was satisfied, and, to the astonishment of every one, a second bellow was heard in the forest, close at hand, like an echo of the first. The call of the moose had resulted much better than they hoped. Dave Blodgett held up two fingers, and as he did so, two noble specimens of the male moose stepped out into the opening. The bulls, as they came out on opposite sides of the opening, glared furiously at each other and began to snuff the air angrily. A grin of delight overspread the face of Dave, and he signed to his friends to lower their weapons, for they were to witness a duel between the giants of the north.

The moose, as old age approaches, becomes misanthropic. First, he breaks away from the large herds and wanders about with two or three companions. Then, even this company grows offensive to him, and like the "rogue" elephant, he wanders alone in the forest, a perfect Ishmaelite of his race. These solitary bulls are absolutely fearless, and if they meet by chance a battle is sure to result, which generally ends fatally for one or both.

The bulls now in the opening were solitary. Irritated at finding a rival in the way, the natural ferocity of their tempers was quickly augmented, and they began to paw the snow and send it flying backward, while they approached each other with the sideling peculiar motion common to the domestic bull, their tails erected and their eyes flashing fire.

Just at the right moment, Alf uttered another low "moo!" and as he did so, the animals clashed together with the fury of giants, and locking in a close grapple, each strove to force the other backward.

The call which Alf had imitated so well inspired them with the utmost fury. Snorting wildly, and exerting all their strength, they course of a long life, had even Dave Blodgett witnessed a scene like this, for the bulls were true monarchs of their species.

Once they staggered apart, glaring with looks of mutual animosity, and stood panting while gathering breath for a new struggle. Their wrinkled fronts, under which gleamed eyes like living coals, lent new terrors to the scene.

Dave raised his hand warningly, and Alf repeated the call, and at the sound the bulls rushed together with greater violence than ever. So terrible was the shock that they bounded back like two balls colliding with equal force. The blood was now streaming from a great gash cut by the sharp fore-hoof of the first moose in the neck of his adversary. They reared upright like two dogs, grappled, striking like gladiators.

"End it, square," whispered Dave. "You and your sons take the one on the right. Wait for the word."

Six rifles cracked as the giants were reared on their hind-feet, contending furiously. As if stricken by bolts from heaven, the brute gladiators sunk down, and the snow was crimsoned with their flowing blood.

"Sometimes I feel right sorry for the work I have to do," said Dave, as he stepped out and administered the *coup de grace* to the struggling animals. "But, you've got two heads for your cabinet, Mr. Tracey, such as men don't get once in a lifetime. But I wouldn't eat a piece of the meat sooner than I would eat a side of sole-leather. I'll git the heads for you an' then we'll toddle home. It's mighty lucky we got here afore deer begin to drop their horns."

It was nearly noon when the loaded sled reached the *ravage*, where they took on such parts of the moose first shot as they fancied, and left the rest to the wolves.

The heads were preserved, and Dave Blodgett volunteered to use a certain preparation when they reached the cabin which would preserve them for all time. Turning down the hills, they reached the bed of the lake, laid their snow-shoes on the sled, strapped on their skates and started for home. As they did so, the long, tremulous howl of the wolf arose on the southern shore of the lake.

"Move yer paddles, boys," said Dave Blodgett. "I ain't anxious fur a fight with wolves on the ice. Ar' ye all loaded? Then git up an' git."

Mr. Tracey and Dave drew the sled; Alf pushed it behind, and the twins skated on the right and left, while Jack, with his panther-skins thrown over his shoulder, skylarked in front. Dave Blodgett, glancing uneasily to the right and left, saw a number of black spots coming up from all directions, concentrate in one moving mass, and come on with lightning speed.

"Wolves, by the big rocker in which Fingal was rocked!" shouted Dave. "Come in hyar, Jack!"

The boy obeyed, and every one prepared his weapon in silence.

"You've all got double rifles 'cept me an' Alf," explained Dave. "Now, look here; you four fire together when I give the word, an' Alf an' me will hold our fire. Then don't you fire ag'in unless they pitch in too lively. Hyar, Spot, hyar, Danger, come to heel!"
The dogs obeyed—Spot willingly enough, but Danger uttering low growls of discontent and wrath. The wolves came on, barking savagely, and evidently mad with hunger.

"Hark!" cried Dave. "Give it to 'em!"
Four rifles cracked, and, discharged into the compact flock, no wonder they did awful execution. Then Alf and Dave let fly, and added to the slaughter.

"On—on!" cried Dave. "Give the dirty thieves time to chaw up their own friends. They'll do it, never fear."

They had passed over half a mile of ice before the wolves again took up the pursuit. By this time every rifle was reloaded, and as the snarling band galloped up to the sled, they received a warmer reception than ever, and again the sled dashed on.

"Give me that big painter-skin," said Dave. Jack handed out the article, and when the wolves came on again, and the rifles again began to play, Dave sprung out on all fours, with the shrill scream of the panther. Instantly every tail was turned, and every wolf was seen maddly dashing up the lake in furious flight, leaving Dave Blodgett extended on the snow, laughing like a hyena. The panther-skin had done its work!

Frost.

BY LUCILLE HOLLS.

"SURELY, to-night, I am the personification of the character my dear friends choose to ascribe to me; they ought to recognize me!" Evelyn Kurtz exclaimed, with a hard bitterness in her usually musically modulated voice, as she viewed herself in the long French mirrors that intensified and multiplied the amber and maroon beauties of her bonhair.

She was a handsome woman, this proud mistress of one of an Eastern city's grandest mansions; and the world—her world—said, that she was haughty and icy as she was regally beautiful. There were others who thought differently, however. Miss Kurtz's European education finished, she had returned to her Eastern home, not the selfish, vain, supercilious young heiress that left it; but a courtly, polished young woman, conscientiously and devotedly religious. Royally she filled her place at the head of her father's superb establishment; with gracious dignity she moved in the gay society that claimed her as its queen, but called her heartless as marble, cold as ice.

She had been wont to smile over people's opinions. It was enough that she was the joy of her father's heart, that through her he revered the religion by which she guided her life; enough that in many homes, whose inmates her society friends would have passed in scorn, she was loved and welcomed, and helped to make dreary lives brighter. Enough that there were those who knew she had a heart—humble, loving, pitiful; a nature tenderly sympathetic, and compassionate with the compassion of love for humanity, freed from pride and condescension.

But there had come a time when her love for her father, and for the poor, and for her church, failed to satisfy every demand of her soul. She cared naught for the adulation, the proffered passion, of the men who thronged about her always. But she had become conscious of the existence of a nature that she felt mated her own. She was no coy, silly girl to tell herself that she could not know what love meant until it was sought. Miss Kurtz knew that the great longings, the restlessness, that disturbed her life after meeting Leroy Cummings was love for him; and that, if he was never more to her than now, a mere acquaintance, she could love no other man with the wealth of passion that throbbed in her heart.

What now? she asked herself as she stood before her costly mirrors, arayed for grand *bal masque*, that Mr. Cummings, whose she had met but a few times at *soirees literaires*, ever would be anything to her?

"He thinks me wondrously beautiful, as I am," she murmured, idly pulling her long, white gloves, with their frills of foamy, old lace, all glittering with some frostlike powder, upon her bare, pearly arms. "And not that alone! not that alone! I am sure! There is in his nature some subtle affinity for mine; in his heart some pulsings of love for me. But he is poor, and proud, and probably believes what people choose to say of me, that I am heartless and cold. I never cared before what society called me. I care now, because he will hear. Ready? Yes, Jeanne."

She swept aside the amber satin draperies that secluded a little alcove, and passed within them to kneel before an ebony crucifix standing upon a carved altar, and pray briefly before she went to mix with the gay worldly crowd that so misjudged her sweet, womanly life.

Even in prayer her thoughts wandered to him.

"Suppose he reads my very soul, will he believe that his physical perfection, his kingliness among men, his brilliant intellect, his high standard of morality, make him far, far more than my equal? If not—if not—oh, Holy Son of Mary! my fate is in thy hands!"

Trustful and calm, she took her frosted white-silk mask and went down to the grand lighted hall—where gorgeous tropical vines flourished, and softly dripping fountains, and dainty gems of landscapes, and flaming winged birds, and pale-yellow songsters, made perfect summer—to receive her father's good-by kiss.

Miss Kurtz's costume was singularly *recherché*—embodied Frost. Her dress—one graceful, trailing mass of some silken, shesny fabric, dazlingly frosted—was wreathed with vines of dead, ice-cased leaves, garlands of glittering grasses, and tiny branches of trees thickly coated with crystals. Her dainty knots of sleeves were caught by spikes of icy twigs, and the foam of rich lace that rose and fell upon her low corsage gleamed frostily. A chain of diamonds sparkled about her throat, suspending a crystal cross, and her great coils of dusky hair, garlanded with drooping, shining leaves, gleamed white with icy sheen.

Wearied with dancing, she sought the quiet and coolness of a little music-room and waited for an ice to be brought her. Just beyond, separated by folds of filmy lace, was the softly lighted library.

Wooded by the dim seclusion of the room, she put aside the lace and entered. Examining a collection of choice engravings that were piled upon a buhl table, in a black domino, her mask studded with silver star spangles on a chair by his side, stood Leroy Cummings. He started at the entrance of the dazzling visitant; but as her manner betrayed only momentary surprise, and she moved toward him, he bowed deferentially, and made room for her by his side. She turned over the engravings silently a moment, then ventured a remark.

"You like this seclusion, and these, better than the whirl in there?" with a motion toward the ball-room, whence floated sounds of music and laughter.

"Oh! infinitely. I have no heart, nor part, in that, but here, among these, I can live."

"You are fond of art?"

"Passionately. The more so that my life is shut off from aught but mere glimpses into its charmed regions."

"You have never traveled, then? Oh! how you would enjoy visiting these places!" Letting her hand lie on the pictures. "Every

one does not appreciate them, but you would grow intoxicated with their beauty! Lovely Italy, and blue-curtained, sea-washed Greece, and glorious Switzerland, and the grand old German countries, you ought to see them all!"—and "you shall!" almost leaped to her lips, as she stood before this man that she would so freely have made king of her life. He poor, semi-Bohemian, once a pauper, she the heiress of a millionaire, and queen of the city's highest circles.

"Ah! madam, you are one of the few that appreciate their blessings," he said, with a quiet smile.

"Nay," she said, slowly, "I would willingly give all the blessings I have for one I have not." And then her partner brought her ice, bowing to Leroy Cummings, who replaced his mask and went away.

"It was Miss Kurtz; there was no mistaking her voice," thought Mr. Cummings, wearily, as he re-entered the thronged salons. "It is cruel, cruel, that I must catch the infatuation with which she inspires men! I, I, a man with no heritage but shame and poverty, to be mad with love for her! Verily I am insane, to dare worship her as I do. Thank God! we are so immeasurably apart in station that no harm can come of my madness! Is she, can she be, wholly as cold as people say she is! As cold as that she chooses to represent to-night? What matter what she is to me?"

But down the room the Frost glittered now, and Leroy made his way toward it.

"Miss Kurtz," he whispered, "will you honor me with one dance?"

"With pleasure, Mr. Cummings; I had no idea you knew me. Shall I keep this waltz for you? I would give you a choice, but all are promised. I think I can arrange about this."

"You honor me too much. Believe me, I shall not lightly value the pleasure."

The crowd parted them. When they met again, and the courtly woman was within his encircling arm, her lustrous eyes meeting his, masks had been laid aside, and the rare, maddening beauty of her dusky, creamy face was close to his own. Was it strange that for the few moments he held her thus his love was veritable madness? Was it not a marvel that such seemed to the other cold and unpassioned? Is it not a false world that would have made one word of what, burned in both hearts seem a stain if uttered?

He sought a place, the dance ended, where Miss Kurtz could get a breath of coolness from the conservatory, and stood fanning her.

"La belle Kurtz is regal to-night, is she not? And such an appropriate costume as she has chosen! Who do you think she is making her latest victim? Mr. Cummings, the young writer. Poor fellow! He is to be puffed if he gets infatuated with her heartless majesty. She is certainly an iceberg—veritable frost!"

The words came distinctly from among the plants, gleaming with blossoms, just a hand's breadth away. Distinctly to Cummings, who fairly shivered with pain and anger, and bit his lips under their golden mustache until drops of blood reddened them. Distinctly to the woman at his side, who, forgetful of the crowd about them, turned to him with a deathly face and misty, agonized eyes, and, in a low, hoarse voice, said:

"You know they do me injustice! Say you know it! that you do not believe what you just heard of me!"

The woman whom he loved so madly, though he had never seen any other phase of her character than that displayed by the perfection of her polished manners or graceful dignity, pleading passionately to him! Oh! God! help him not to forget himself!

"I do not believe what people say of you; but that you are good and noble—a woman worthy naught less than worship; and that you are in no wise to blame that I have come to reverence you above all your sex! Do not think too hardly of me that I have spoken the truth; for, believe me, I am quite conscious of my own madness!"

Weary weeks had passed since Leroy Cummings had breathed those words to Evelyn Kurtz, and passed from her presence. Since then they had never met. Wearily, with a deep sorrow in her heart, she moved daily among the poor and sick; languidly, coldly, more frostily than ever she smiled and talked and danced in the salons of the rich, and rejoiced when Lent brought her rest and seclusion.

At last she told herself that there could be no unwomanliness in her, the heiress, suing to the poor Bohemian she loved. So she wrote to Cummings and told him what his words had meant to her, for she, Evelyn Kurtz, had loved him. To-day, his answer, bearing a date three days old, had been placed in her hands. His answer, blessing her for her kindness, but firmly stating that it was impossible for him to so far forget what was due to her or his own manhood as to take advantage of her noble condescension.

With white lips she crushed the note in her hand, and went to her little chapel, to fight her battle with wounded pride and hopelessness and pain.

An hour later Miss Kurtz was treading the city streets on her daily round of errands of mercy.

"I will call on Lizzie before I go home," she decided; and turned into a pleasant, respectable street and ran up the steps of a little brick house on whose wall was a dressmaker's sign.

A young girl opened the door.

"Oh! Miss Kurtz! How nice it is to see you! We have been so wishing you would come!"

"Yes, I have been a long time away, Allie dear. How is Lizzie?"

"Quite well," said Allie, leading the way to the second story. "We get along so nicely since you found this pleasant place for us. Lizzie says she shall soon be able, very comfortably, to pay the rent herself. She is up-stairs; I will call her."

Lizzie came down presently, and after a joyful greeting to her visitor, went on:

"Miss Kurtz, there is a gentleman up-stairs very ill. It is so sad, he has a mother who is insane, quite harmless, almost an idiot, poor thing! but she seems to know that her son is ill, and has changed so these last two days with grieving, her nurse is afraid she may drop off before the son."

"How sad! Are they very poor? Can I do anything for them?"

"Well, when he was well he worked hard to support his mother in comfort, and a nurse for her; now he is ill, they may need help. He was a newspaper writer, I believe; a nice man."

"I will go and see him, Lizzie."

From the nurse, Miss Kurtz learned that the man had typhoid fever, and while not earning anything, had little to support him. From that day Miss Kurtz kept the poor writer supplied with flowers, and luxuries, and healthful food; paid bills; and, when his mother died,

provided dainty vesture and silvered casket for her, and placed waxen blooms upon her quiet breast.

Then came a night when she said to the little dressmaker:
"I have a favor to ask of you to-night, Lizzie. I want to lie down a few hours upon your lounge. By midnight the doctor will pronounce the verdict of life or death upon my patient, and I have become so interested I wish to hear it direct. I have sent the carriage home until one."

And so, wrapped in a coarse, warm shawl of Allie's, Miss Kurtz rested her stately form upon the little chintz lounge, and waited for the doctor's tap upon the door.

Midnight; ten, fifteen, twenty minutes after. Miss Kurtz arose and went softly up to the sick man's room, pushed the door ajar and entered. The doctor stood beside his patient with his fingers upon the thin wrist.

"He is dead," Miss Kurtz heard him say, softly; and then another man, bending over the white, upturned face, dropped some tears upon it. At the sound of the woman's gently rustling dress, both men looked up, and Evelyn Kurtz stood face to face with Leroy Cummings, his golden hair thrust back from a pallid brow and tears in his blue, proud eyes.

"Miss Kurtz, poor Stanley is dead," the doctor said, kindly.

"He was a friend of yours?" she asked of Cummings, from whom she had not removed her eyes.

"He was, and I have so much to thank you for in his behalf. If he had lived, it would have been through your kind care."

"Or yours," said the doctor, bluntly, "since you watched with him every night. You both did all you could."

"How is it I did not know this?" questioned Evelyn, still of Leroy.

"I took care that you should not," he answered her. He had come close to her, now; and was gazing with passionate longing into her beautiful, sorrowful face. "I did not mean that you should meet me!"

For a minute both were silent, then Miss Kurtz said, slowly and low:

"Your pride is manly and natural; but is it not bitterly wrong?"

"Oh, Evelyn! I have only such humble rooms as these of Stanley's. What would the world say of me if I dared to ask you to be my wife?"

His voice was full of suppressed passion, his eyes of intense love, despite his resolve not to be tempted.

"Is what the 'world will say' of more account to you than your own happiness, and mine?"

"God forgive my folly! No, Evelyn! Surely, love is above all!"

He gathered her hands in his—he the child of the people, and she the noble, womanly patrician—and slipped under her finger a quaintly carved old ring he wore. And so they were betrothed, and as he led her away from his friend's death-bed, and down to her waiting carriage, he whispered:

"God bless you forever, my noble wife; and forgive me that to you, who are His own glorious sunshine, I should so long have been frost."

Beat Time's Notes.

KNIFE AND FORK FLIRTATIONS.

To drop your fork means: "I am desperately in love."

To pick your teeth with a fork means: "I am the pick of the lot."

To stir your coffee with a fork means: "How sweet you are."

To scratch your head with a fork means: "I itch for an acquaintance with you."

To drum on your plate with your knife and fork means: "I am almost crazy."

To eat your soup with a fork means: "Is it possible?"

To knock a tooth out with a fork means: "You are very beautiful."

To dip your own knife into the butter means: "I am not very particular, you see."

To draw the knife half way down your throat means: "I am enjoying myself very well, I thank you."

To whet your knife on your fork means: "You see I'm sharp."

To eat with your knife means: "I'm not posted."

To drop your knife means: "I am badly bored."

To let your knife slip and splatter the gravy out of your plate means: "I am exceedingly happy to be here."

To cut your mouth with a knife means: "I am very impatient."

To wipe your knife on the table cloth means: "All right."

To wipe your nose on a napkin means: "I am making a fool of myself."

Cold weather is exceedingly thick in these parts. It is the coldest cold that a man with the worst cold in the world could imagine. It would freeze a red hot stove. It is so cold that wood won't burn, and you can't even enjoy the luxury of scalding your mouth with a hot cup of coffee. Thermometers are down to fifteen cents, with a prospect of being cheaper yet. Dog irons in the chimney places shiver and whine all day. It takes old enemies all the time to nurse their wrath to keep it warm. A little something hot, if you please.

Recipe for dough-nuts:—Take three parts of clay, one part hydraulic cement, one part plaster of paris, mix with Spalding's prepared glue, and make it into balls. Allow them to dry, glaze them, and put them into a Bessemer furnace, heated seven times hotter than is necessary for melting iron, and let them stay there one week, then take them out and serve cold. At least I think this is the way those we had for breakfast to-day were got up, and you couldn't get them down without a crowbar.

A certain town out in Kansas is a very healthy